



I N L A N D  
R I V E R S  
N E T W O R K

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### **Submission to the Agricultural Competitiveness Green Paper**

The Inland Rivers Network (“IRN”) is a coalition of environment groups and individuals concerned about the degradation of the rivers, wetlands and groundwaters of the Murray-Darling Basin. It has been advocating for the conservation of rivers, wetlands and groundwater in the Murray-Darling Basin since 1991.

Member groups include the Australian Conservation Foundation; the Nature Conservation Council of NSW; the National Parks Association of NSW; Friends of the Earth; Central West Environment Council; the Coast and Wetlands Society and the Wilderness Society, Sydney.

IRN does not support the recommendations in the Agricultural Competitiveness Green Paper (‘the Green Paper’) to consider the funding of new dams in Australia. Planning for Australia’s future water supply must concentrate on managing demand and investing in improved water use efficiency for existing high water use industries.

Climate change predictions will place greater pressure on Australia’s water availability. There is no capacity to consider the growth of large water using industries.

The phasing out of flood irrigation for cotton and rice production should be a high priority for improving the water use efficiency of existing industries.

The fact that agriculture is the largest single user of water, 59% in 2011-12 (ABS 2013c), and irrigated agriculture produces only 29% of the gross value of agricultural

value (ABS 2013g) is a clear indication that water use efficiency in agriculture needs to be improved.

The Australian taxpayer has expended \$15b in water reform processes since 2007. A majority of this investment is based on addressing the environmental degradation of the Murray Darling Basin caused by the number of large instream storages and over allocation of water access entitlements.

IRN does not support investment in new dams in Australia because of the damage caused to the environmental integrity of river and wetland systems and the social and economic impacts on downstream communities that rely on natural flooding regimes and on healthy rivers.

The environmental impacts of large dams are well known and well documented in a wide range of international, national and Murray-Darling Basin studies.

The regulation of the major river systems has caused the loss of natural flow sequences and volumes of flow, change in seasonality of flows, impacts on water quality both instorage and instream and loss of connectivity with floodplains and groundwater systems. The reduction of wetlands, water dependent vegetation communities and wildlife populations has been a major negative outcome from the impoundment of large volumes of river water across the state.

The social and economic impacts of large dams are also well understood with challenges to water sharing and equity for downstream communities and industries developed around natural flood sequences.

The management of water delivery and constraints, costs to broader community and issues associated with maintenance, dam safety and mitigation of environmental impacts are major challenges for dam managers.

IRN considers that the Federal Government support for a cap of 1500 GL on water buybacks to achieve the outcomes of the Murray Darling Basin Plan is a retrograde step that will prevent the cost effective achievement of the Basin Plan outcomes.

Sustainable communities rely on a healthy environment. Water sources are a critical element of the Australian environment that has already been over exploited.

There will be no future for competitiveness of Australian agriculture if increased demand for water use is not well managed. New dams will not improve water security in Australia. They will cause a retrograde step in redressing current degradation of the natural environment.

Yours sincerely



Bev Smiles