



## Media Release

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### Commission of inquiry into Darling is welcome but we simply need more H<sub>2</sub>O for nature to work

NSW Nature Conservation Council and the Inland Rivers Network welcome NSW Labor's plan for a special commission of inquiry into management of the Darling River system, especially if it results in new measures to ensure environmental water flows are protected.

"The Darling River system is in a deplorable state because the NSW Government has put the interests of agribusiness ahead of the environment," **NCC CEO Kate Smolski said.**

"All parties in NSW should commit to revising all existing and proposed water-sharing plans to ensure they reflect the effects of climate change on rainfall and river flows.

"Inexplicably, water-sharing plans in NSW are based on average flows before 2004, before the Millennium Drought. Treating the Millennium drought as an aberration rather than a new norm is at best wishful thinking and at worst gross incompetence."

**Inland Rivers Network spokesperson Bev Smiles said:** "Water has been purchased with taxpayer's money to provide water for environmental purposes such as supporting native fish populations.

"However, over the past five years, nearly 22,000 million litres of environmental water have been traded to the irrigation industry, mainly cotton growers.

"This water could have been used to improve flows for native fish. Just last August the NSW Government sold 15,000 ML of environmental water to the irrigation industry.

"Robbing the environment of water is devastating our rivers and wetlands, decimating wildlife, and pushing some communities to the brink.

"We welcome the ALP's commitment to restore low and medium flows and its plan to reinstate 'cease-to-pump' rules.

"But until the Murray Darling Basin Plan includes adequate, protected environmental flows, fish kills like those we have seen over the past few weeks will continue."

The Nature Conservation Council and Inland Rivers Network are calling on the NSW Government to:

- **Mandate environmental flows.** Water management regimes must mandate flows sufficient to maintain healthy, functioning river systems and wetlands. Water-sharing plans must include enforceable rules and allocations of environmental water.
- **Tighten the water-use monitoring regime.** The government must implement the 'no meter, no pump' objective universally. Systemic failures have led to poor monitoring and enforcement of water

laws, including alleged corruption and criminal activity in relation to improper use and over-extraction of water.

- **Control floodplain harvesting.** The government must require cumulative environmental assessment prior to issuing floodplain harvesting licences, and place limits on extraction. Irrigators in Northern Basin catchments have built levees and dams to capture and store floodwaters which have stopped water flowing downstream to recharge groundwater and fill billabongs, lagoons and wetlands.
- **Rule out new dams.** Promote more efficient water usage and do not build new dams. Large dams and weirs alter natural water flows, significantly degrading the health of rivers. New dams do not create more water, they redistribute water, withholding it from downstream users and the environment.

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