

NSW Minister for Water, Rose Jackson MP

CC: NSW Minister for Environment, Penny Sharpe, Federal Environment Minister, Murray Watt, Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder, Dr Simon Banks

Urgent intervention required to prevent significant loss of biodiversity in the Murray-Darling

Dear Minister Jackson,

We write to alert you to an ecological crisis unfolding across the Murray-Darling system in NSW and request your *urgent intervention to reinstate vital water to the river system to prevent significant loss of biodiversity* during the spring of 2025.

NSW water rules named as reason for water no longer flowing

On 18th August 2025, the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder (CEWH), Dr Simon Banks, announced a pause on environmental watering in NSW. Dr Banks said that this is because of a change in the interpretation of NSW water laws, and that Commonwealth environmental watering will proceed once the CEWH is confident it meets its obligations under NSW rules. The release of some NSW environmental water has also been stopped.

Statements by NSW and Commonwealth Government representatives indicate that this decision relates to metering of environmental water and the definition of 'take.'

NSW and Commonwealth environmental water managers have not indicated when all environmental flows will resume in NSW.

Despite it being a matter of great public, cultural, environmental, and scientific importance, no adequate explanations have been provided by the NSW or Commonwealth Governments.

NSW Water Minister has the power to intervene

Minister, you and the agencies in your portfolio have the power to resume all environmental watering immediately. Permanent damage is the only result of delaying this decision while clarity to law and regulations are addressed. This is an administrative issue. There is no reason to stop environmental water flows while it is resolved.

No water equals environmental disaster

The stop on environmental watering in NSW could not have been imposed at a worse time. The timing of environmental water releases is crucial for life on the river system. This water held behind dams should be flowing in rivers and wetlands now.

Stopping environmental flows will cause serious harm to riverine and wetland ecosystems, including threatened ecological communities. These include Ramsar-listed wetlands, habitats essential for the protection of birds listed as part of Australia's Migratory Bird Agreements with China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea, and species listed as threatened under Commonwealth and NSW legislation.

For example, the Macquarie Marshes, a Ramsar-listed wetland, provides critical habitat for Australian Painted Snipe, one of the world's rarest birds. Adequate and timely environmental

watering is critical for the survival of this species. Native fish are under threat across the Basin. Environmental flows are essential for their movement and breeding.

NSW and the Commonwealth are responsible for life on the river system

The Commonwealth Water Act 2007 and the Murray Darling Basin Plan are ways that Australia implements its treaty obligations under the Ramsar Convention, the Biodiversity Convention, and bilateral agreements concerning migratory birds. Water for the environment is the key means by which these obligations are met.

Why water for the environment is important

NSW has obligations to protect the environment and threatened species under state and federal legislation. Water for the environment is essential to protect the health of rivers and wetlands, native plants and animals, and support fishing and tourism.

Governments emphasise the great cultural and spiritual significance of rivers and wetlands to Aboriginal people. They point out the importance of the right amount of water in the right place at the right time, and that water is delivered when and where it's needed to help rivers and communities stay healthy. Water is released in spring so that fish and other animals have water to feed, breed and migrate. The NSW and Commonwealth governments issue regular statements about the importance of environmental watering, using cultural knowledge, developing productive partnerships, ensuring native fish movement, and a recent focus on floodplains and waterbirds.

Minister, we the undersigned seek your urgent action to prevent an ecological disaster occurring in the spring breeding season on the Murray-Darling River system in NSW.

Sincerely,

Bill Johnson, River Integrity Project
Garry Hall, President Macquarie Marshes Environmental Landholders Association
Brendan Kennedy, Chair, Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations
Sandra Suey-Thorne, Speaker, Dharriwaa Elders Group
Jacqui Mumford, Chief Executive Officer, Nature Conservation Council of NSW
Rod Campbell, Research Director, The Australia Institute
Bev Smiles, President, Inland Rivers Network,
Tony Lees, Chair, Cultural and Heritage Committee, Trangie Local Aboriginal Land Council
Dr Matt Herring, Director, Murray Wildlife
Dr Martin Mallen-Cooper, Charles Sturt University
Dr Matt Colloff, Fenner School of Environment & Society, Australian National University
Cassie Price, Chief Executive Officer, OzFish
Mel Gray, Convenor, Healthy Rivers Dubbo
Leanne Hall, Proprietor, Willie Retreat
Rob McBride, Director, Tolarno Station
Professor (ANU) R. Quentin Grafton FASSA, Water Justice Hub
John Williams, FTSE, Honorary Professor ANU, Water Justice Hub



River Integrity Project



MACQUARIE MARSHES ENVIRONMENTAL LANDHOLDERS ASSOCIATION

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DHARRIWAA ELDERS GROUP



INLAND RIVERS NETWORK

Willie Retreat



Macquarie Marshes



Nature Conservation Council