

NSW Water Minister Urged to Act: Environmental Water Halt Risks Crisis in Murray-Darling

A coalition of Aboriginal, environmental, scientific and community leaders has called on the NSW Minister for Water, Rose Jackson, to reverse the recent stop of environmental water releases in the NSW Murray-Darling Basin.

They warn that because the stop coincides with the start of the Spring breeding season, it has created a significant risk to threatened ecosystems, including Ramsar-listed wetlands, vital habitats for migratory birds, and endangered fish species.

The Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder announced the halt was because of a changed interpretation of NSW water laws, particularly around metering and the definition of 'take'. But neither the NSW or Commonwealth governments have explained the specific detail to the public.

"Governments routinely talk about the cultural, ecological, and economic importance of healthy rivers and wetlands, but they're letting a technicality override that," said Rick Townsend, from the Dharriwaa Elders Group in Walgett.

"This is yet another example of the NSW Government's mismanagement of water and poor environmental policy", said Rod Campbell from The Australia Institute. "It is inconceivable that the NSW Government would let a bureaucratic bungle like this prevent water being extracted for cotton farming, but when it comes to the environment it doesn't seem to matter."

"We believe there are solutions that the NSW Water Minister could employ to overcome the halt without changes to the NSW laws," said Bill Johnson, from the River Integrity Project. "These could be put in place now."

The group calls on Minister Jackson, with support from the NSW Minister for Environment, Penny Sharpe, the Federal Environment and Water Minister, Murray Watt, and the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder, Simon Banks, to restore environmental water to the system immediately.

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