



Pastoralists' Association

of West Darling Inc.

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Draft NSW Water Strategy Submission

The Pastoralists' Association of West Darling (PAWD) has represented the interests of pastoralists in far west NSW since 1907, including those on the Darling River between Bourke and Wentworth. Pastoralists depend on the river to supply water for stock and domestic use, and water in the channel also acts as a boundary fence between neighbouring properties. The Darling River is also vitally important for town water supplies, indigenous people, small scale high value irrigation enterprises and environmental health. Accordingly, PAWD makes the following submission to the draft NSW Water Strategy.

The Darling River is almost totally reliant on inflows from its tributaries. In recent decades there has been a significant reduction in the volume and frequency of flow events in the Darling River, which has largely been attributed to excessive upstream extraction for irrigation purposes. The subsequent decline in general river health, horticulture at Menindee and associated environmental catastrophes are well known, and serve to highlight the fact that current water management regimes in NSW are failing to deliver fair and equitable outcomes for all stakeholders, with much of the disadvantage associated with reduced water availability being felt by downstream environments and communities.

PAWD supports the adoption of water management policy that protects flows in our river systems. As a starting point, the Objects and Water management principles of the Water Management Act 2000 are an excellent guide for the implementation of fair and reasonable water sharing arrangements across NSW. Accordingly, PAWD recommends that the development of the NSW Water Strategy adheres to the Objects and Principles of the Act, and not doing so will serve to perpetuate the disadvantage being experienced by stakeholders on the Darling River.

The proposed development of twelve regional water strategies is noted. Given the Darling River's reliance on inflows from its tributaries, it is critically important that the regional water strategies on the western fall of the Great Dividing Range are developed with the requirements of downstream stakeholders and the environment in mind. Accordingly, it would be appropriate to develop the western regional water strategies concurrently, with adequate community consultation and a review process to ensure that no specific water strategy unreasonably impacts on downstream stakeholders or ecosystems.

PAWD is concerned that the NSW Water Strategy will call for the construction of new dams the upper reaches of catchments on the western fall of the Great Dividing Range. Whilst new dams may have a positive impact for stakeholders close to the dam, they will have a negative impact on water flows to the lower reaches of our long inland rivers, and are accordingly not an appropriate outcome if water is to be shared equitably between all stakeholders.

As a key prerequisite, the NSW Water Strategy must ensure that the health of our river systems from top to bottom is improved, and the needs of stakeholders on the Darling River downstream of Bourke are accounted for. The NSW Water Strategy must also prioritise the needs of the environment, town water supplies and stock and domestic users over and above the use of water for any other purpose in NSW.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft NSW Water Strategy.

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Councillor, PAWD.