**Business or Community member**

We encourage you to individually submit to the inquiry to provide the real story behind why certainty for the irrigation industry, in turn offers certainty for businesses and the economy and our community.

The objective is to explain the negative impacts of not licencing floodplain harvesting and the importance of irrigation to you, your business and the broader community.

Who should submit:

* Business owners that are directly impacted by changes in water availability and changes in decision making by irrigators.
* Employees, whose employment is directly impacted by changes in water availability like droughts and floods.
* People who want to see a sustainable future for agriculture and stop the vilification of our farmers.

Don’t forget to make it about you, introduce yourself the family and a bit about the business.

Submissions are lodged via the Committee Webpage: <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/listofcommittees/Pages/committee-details.aspx?pk=274#tab-submissions>

Submissions are due by 13 August 2021.

Below are some key messages to consider and there’s an example submission which you can just paste directly into the Inquiry Submission box using the link. There are some sections highlighted in red to provide you options or suggestions.

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| Key messages to convey:* Irrigation is important to our business and community, and we all need certainty.
* We are sick of being persecuted publicly through no fault of our own but a lack of government regulation.
* Floods are important for our region to recover economically from drought, and be better prepared to survive the next one, but the uncertainty about what the industry can and can’t do is undermining business confidence.
* Licensing floodplain harvesting and keeping rainfall runoff from irrigated fields on farms, which are both historical behaviours, is the solution.
* Neither practice is new water or additional water that wasn’t already used and managed by farmers.
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**EXAMPLE**

As a community member of Moree, Mungindi, Collarenebri, Walgett which is an irrigation-dependent community and as a NSW taxpayer, I support that the simple principle that all major forms of water take for irrigation should be licensed, metered and reported to Government and our community. This includes floodplain harvesting, which is a crucial source of water in our region when it is in plentiful supply during floods.

Whilst I am not an irrigator (I/my business), relies on irrigation and floodplain harvesting because……

I employ XX people, or I work in a businesss that employs XX people and we are reliant on agriculture and irrigated agriculture.

It is water that drives the economy around here whether its rain from the sky or flows in the river or across the floodplain, water means business. There should be fair and equitable access to water with clear rules aimed at sharing water when its available. Floodplain harvesting must be licensed and metered, like all other forms of take to achieve this state-wide.

Any water reform or change in water availability affects local workers, businesses, schools, medical facilities and the well-being of our towns. You’ve only got to look at what’s happened to our small towns over the last 10-15 years following the Basin Plan and drought.

Licensing provides certainty for my community, our (my) businesses and our key industry, agriculture.

We need to know when the next flood occurs that the region is entitled to its share. With floodplain licences in place, the local industry can access that water without fear of public persecution or prosecution by regulators. Because without licensing all water take, we will continue to be the target of a vicious hate campaign fuelled by misinformation. This constant vilification is destroying the reputation and mental wellbeing of farmers and related businesses.

It’s also not fair to brand irrigators thieves when multiple Governments, of all stripes have allowed them to capture water in this way since irrigation began.

Governments of all affiliations have allowed this to occur through their inaction on regulating floodplain harvesting for more than 20 years. It is time we stopped playing politics with people’s livelihoods and the sustainability of our regional communities and economies. This needs to be fixed now, while there’s water to share.

Floodplain harvesting licensing must balance the highly variable nature of floods in northern ephemeral systems, allowing access when our rivers and floodplains are inundated and water is most abundant, to store for future use. This provides our community and the industry certainty around water available for irrigation, and the ability to smooth out the peaks and troughs of water availability in a highly variable system.

I fully support water users being compliant with the rules but the community impact of transitioning to these licences that reduce floodplain access cannot be ignored. Water buybacks destroyed small communities, this cannot happen again.

I am told this will have on average long-term reduction more than $90M impact to our economy, as total water available to irrigators is reduced meaning they grow less food and fibre, they order less supplies from businesses and likely employ less people in our community.

Regulation should take into consideration our local community. Currently the discussion is only about the risk to the environment and downstream communities with no reference to us. Upstream communities must be considered, they are no less important than other communities on the system. But transitional arrangements will be needed, so that water users can meet their legal requirements and their businesses as well as those supporting them can adjust.

Drought hit everyone hard that includes the environment, farmers, local businesses including mine and the community.

For me the drought hit hard and a flood provides an opportunity for my business to recover and keep my staff on and employ more people.

FOR EXAMPLE: I usually employ XX people but after good rainfall and hopefully a flood I increase this to match demand. If the local irrigation industry doesn’t have clear rules then they may forfeit water for fear of prosecution, then I will not have the increased demand and be able to employ the additional staff and be in extended drought. I am hearing now, many are not taking supplementary for fear they will max out their allocation during summer, when they need it most. This will have a direct flow on to my business, if they grow less.

FOR EXAMPLE: I managed to keep my XX staff employed (or my job) during drought thanks to the reserves that I managed to build up (or my employer secured). This was from the last boom year in our region of 2016, when there was moderate flooding in some areas of the region and great river flows. Menindee was nearly full. If the local irrigation industry doesn’t have clear rules then they may forfeit water for fear of prosecution or be forced to miss this next flood, which means I do not (or my employer) doesn’t get the boom of business to rebuild our reserves which may mean, I (we) may not make the next flood.

FOR EXAMPLE: I provide retail goods to the local community and in years when there is rainfall, and good river flows and even a flood, I am able to generate the income needed to keep myself and my casual employees open when times are tougher. If the local irrigation industry doesn’t have clear rules then they may forfeit water for fear of prosecution or be forced to miss this next flood, and we are into an extended drought I am not sure there is viability to continue to operate without the boom to carry me to the next drought.

I saw the river dry up, kangaroos dying from lack of food and dry scorched landscape.

Floods provide these same groups; the environment, farmers, local businesses including mine and the community the opportunity to recover. Floodplain harvesting licensing will enable balance between community and environment, so it’s clear there is sharing and both can take advantage of the opportunities floods present.

It is illogical for anyone to suggest no water should be captured and set aside when our communities and landscape are full and over-flowing with water. It is the most sensible time to be capturing water to be stored for later use when rivers run low and droughts set in.

It is time the NSW Government and NSW Parliament, did their job and made rules for all NSW water uses. It is unacceptable to leave some water users outside the regulatory framework. All water users must be treated in a fair and equitable manner and that should include those that floodplain harvest.

If you do not implement these regulations State-wide, then the system of inequity and unjustified persecution will continue.