

WENTWORTH GROUP OF CONCERNED SCIENTISTS

Dr Emma Carmody, Mr Peter Cosier AM, Prof Tim Flannery FAA, Mr Mike Grundy, Dr Terry Hillman AM, Prof Lesley Hughes,
Prof David Karoly FAA, Prof Richard Kingsford, Prof Martine Maron, A/Prof Bradley Moggridge, Prof Jamie Pittock,
Mr Robert Purves AM, Prof Fran Sheldon, Ms Anna Skarbek, Prof Bruce Thom AM, Mr Martijn Wilder AM.

Ms Cate Faehrmann, MLC
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

29 September 2021

Dear Ms Faehrmann,

On 24 September, the work of the Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists was misrepresented at the NSW Upper House Inquiry in Floodplain Harvesting. As this occurred when we were not able to address these inaccurate comments, we now seek to clarify the record and request that you accept this letter as a supplementary submission.

On the third day of hearings, in response to a question from National Party member Mr Ben Franklin, Mr Andrew Brown, a Principal Modeller at NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment made comments that were factually incorrect and which suggest that he either had not read the analysis or had not understood our 2020 report “Assessment of river flows in the Murray-Darling Basin: Observed versus expected flows under the Basin Plan 2012-2019” (<https://wentworthgroup.org/2020/09/mdb-flows-2020/2020/>).

That the question posed by Mr Franklin is outside of the scope of the Terms of Reference of the Inquiry is also concerning, but we would like to address the facts.

1. The Wentworth Group’s analysis adjusted modelled river flows based on the volume of environmental water that had been recovered as a proportion of the total water recovery. Scaling river flows between the without-Basin-Plan scenario and with-Basin-Plan scenario represents the best available technique to account for the staged implementation of the Basin Plan as agreed by the MDBA and the CEWO. There was no assumption that the Basin Plan was in place when it was not.
2. We did not assume that recovered water would appear in the river. We assessed model output built by DPIE, integrated by the CSIRO, and simulated by the MDBA. Any assumptions about environmental water in rivers arises from the modelling process which was used to evaluate the volume of water needed to be recovered for the environment to reflect an Environmentally Sustainable Level of Take.

The 2020 Wentworth Group report that Mr Brown seeks to discredit is indeed uncomfortable reading. We found that between 2012 and 2019 there was some two trillion litres of water missing from the Murray-Darling Basin, but this report is based on sound science and the methodology was subsequently used by the MDBA in their 2020 Basin Plan evaluation.

The Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists is one of many Basin stakeholders seeking safeguards to ensure the Government's proposed approach to regulating floodplain harvesting provides protection for downstream communities and the environment.

What Mr Brown's ill-informed comments do demonstrate though is the need for more transparent modelling, monitoring and reporting, including a new Basin-wide model and double entry water accounting (that records water left in the rivers as well as that extracted, so as to identify and address discrepancies). We note that the federal budget allocated funding towards new Basin-wide modelling. Better modelling is urgently needed to enhance water management, as demonstrated in Mr Brown's correspondence on the limitations of floodplain water modelling that was provided to the Committee. NSW participation in the new Basin-wide modelling process can contribute to more accurate water accounting, greater transparency, and better outcomes for all stakeholders.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jamie Pittock'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name 'Jamie' written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name 'Pittock'.

Prof Jamie Pittock, Acting Director, on behalf of the Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists