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A new vision to revive our rivers in the Murray-Darling Basin



On the tenth anniversary of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan, peak conservation groups covering every basin state are calling on governments to revive Australia's biggest river system by following this shared vision.

WATER FOR RIVERS

Too much water has been taken from inland rivers for too long, denying them the flows they need to be healthy. When rivers have the water they need, they sustain a thriving web of birds, plants, fish, molluscs and animals in a myriad of wetlands, aquifers and floodplains. Rivers need water so they can continue to support the oldest living culture on the planet. We need to set targets to return that water to the river, taking into account the impacts of a hotter, drier climate, and confidently measuring our progress.

NATURAL RHYTHM OF RIVER FLOWS

Rivers need to flood regularly. The floodplain developed over thousands of years to support a delicate mosaic of different vegetation and habitat. Centuries-old River Red Gums, riverine wetlands and Black Box woodlands need a cycle of wetting and drying. Allowing more regular small to medium floods would sustain these places and reduce the severity of blackwater events. By collaborating with communities on the floodplain, upgrading and relocating flood-prone infrastructure, these landscapes can get the water they need. We can restore natural flows, instead of re-engineering the floodplain.

WATER RIGHTS FOR TRADITIONAL OWNERS

The Basin is the ancestral domain for over 40 First Nations but colonisation has left them with few rights over land and water. Over-extraction and water markets have doubled down on this dispossession – further damaging Country, disempowering Traditional Owners in water management and denying their share of wealth made from their land. Until we address this history, any pursuit of reconciliation will remain out of reach. Recognising self-determination means returning water to support cultural traditions and community development. We need to make sure First Nations have a say over how rivers and Country are managed.

RESILIENT REGIONAL COMMUNITIES

River communities are entitled to employment, income, education, health care, decent housing and a high standard of living. Regional communities are also on the front lines of climate change, disappearing river flows and erratic flood events. We need ongoing funding for communities to adapt to a drying climate with diverse, resilient economies.

WATER MARKET WITHIN ECOLOGICAL LIMITS

Lacking water market integrity has brought unintended consequences to people and the environment. Speculators and multinationals reap windfall profits while communities are short-changed. Crooks and profiteers have undermined compliance, building illegal dams and exploiting loopholes in water sharing plans. Water trade has overturned the seasonal timing and intensity of flows, eroding riverbanks and hurting fish populations. We need a water market that serves the needs of people and respects ecological limits.

