

INLAND RIVERS



A message from Water Campaigner, Mel Gray

In recent years we have seen the rivers and wetlands of inland NSW collapse and horrific fish kills that attracted international attention; all while the previous government continued to hand out even more entitlement for irrigators to take water off floodplains.

Clearly, too much water is taken from the tributary rivers that feed water to the Darling/Baaka.

We did not agree with the way the law that was meant to protect our rivers was being applied, so early this year when the time came for our water and climate court case to be heard in the Land and Environment Court, we were sure to secure game-changing commitments from the current NSW Water and Environment Ministers about the way pumping limits are set in NSW.

The strength of our inland rivers campaign is in our grounding in the community and the depth of the relationships we formed over the years. Our trip to the *River People's Forum: First Nations Water Rights and Justice* event in Swan Hill allowed us to road trip with a Wiradjuri Traditional Owner and enable her important contribution to the event.

The release of the *Connectivity Report* which details how the Darling/Baaka can be saved was an important moment for our campaign. We headed off to Parliament House bringing Traditional Owners and graziers from the Basin with us. Our *Reconnect Our Rivers: Voices from the Basin* event co-hosted by MLC's Stephen Lawrence, Jeremy Buckingham and Cate Faehrmann elevated the importance of this opportunity to lock in fundamental improvements for the Darling/Baaka River within the halls of power.

As a founding member of the Murray-Darling Conservation Alliance, NCC has continued to work with peak environmental groups from Queensland, ACT, Victoria and South Australia, focusing on the shape of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan over the coming decades.

Thank you for your invaluable support.

Mel Gray

Water Campaigner

Nature Conservation Council NSW



2024 at a glance

We had a strong year advocating for policy improvements for inland rivers across NSW and with local member groups by:

- Securing significant commitments from the NSW Government for improvements to water management in NSW.
- Advocacy trips to NSW Parliament in May and August elevating the importance of reforms to improve the health of the Darling/Baaka River.

We multiplied our impact through strategic collaborations. We continue to contribute to the work of the Murray-Darling Conservation Alliance, of which NCC is a founding member. As part of the Conservation Alliance we represented environmental and community perspectives at many webinars, roundtables, conferences, site trips and in preparing submissions.

Our challenges

While the politics is amenable for us to secure policy improvements thanks to NCC's relationships with decision makers – and we have been able to secure some very meaningful wins – this does mean our capacity for the essential work of community organising is stretched as we focus on policy reform. We have secured two passionate and skilled volunteers for the water campaign, who have expanded our ability to stay in touch with our member base.

What we did



Settled our court case against the NSW Government winning some important commitments from the government

The improvements we secured by settling the Climate and Water court case have already led to mandatory reviews of pumping limits being embedded in the legal instruments that manage waterways as these legal documents get renewed.



Defended the Macquarie Marshes against a gold mining threat

The NSW Resources Access Regulator granted a licence to Canadian company Australian Consolidated Gold Holdings over wetland in the core of the internationally significant wetland, the Macquarie Marshes. NCC filed a court case in the Land and Environment Court against the Minister for Natural Resources and the prospector. After we got word out in the media and the day before we served the case, the regulator withdrew their approval. However, the miner has now taken the regulator to the Land and Environment Court to get the drilling approval reinstated. We will continue to fight this threat.



Mobilised people to action

We were shocked when it seemed the Government might ignore a critical element of the connectivity report – the need for an independent panel to contribute to and oversee the work. So, we worked with our partners at Environment Victoria and as a result over 1,700 people from across NSW and Victoria wrote to the NSW Government asking that the recommendation for independent oversight of the process be honoured.

Soon after, we received the news that there would indeed be an inter-agency working group established to support the work being done to turn the recommendations in the *Connectivity Report* into tangible, life-giving river flows for the Murray-Darling Basin.



Connected the Basin to NSW Parliament

Bringing a delegation from the Northern Basin, including farmers, graziers, and Traditional Owners was a powerful opportunity to tell the story of this important river system and what it needs to survive. The *Reconnecting Our Rivers: Voices from the Basin* event at NSW Parliament was attended by the Minister for Water Rose Jackson and co-hosted by a number of cross-benchers. We certainly got the important message to the government, that the tributary rivers of the Darling/Baaka need more water to survive.



Educated and informed politicians and the public

We produced a number of MP briefings on issues such as the Connectivity Report, overdue fish passage projects, drought reserves and dam supply levels. We held a webinar on the court case settlement, produced a number of social media campaign videos and reels about the Murray Darling Basin, and got thousands of signatures on our Reconnect our Rivers and Protect the Macquarie Marshes petitions.

Our goals for 2025

In 2025 we will advocate for policy improvements for inland rivers across NSW and with local member groups by:

- actively following the progress on the implementation of the court case commitments and the connectivity report recommendations with direct advocacy and public actions and commentary;
- supporting local member groups with their campaigns to improve water security for communities and wildlife in inland NSW.

We will continue to contribute to the work of the Murray-Darling Conservation Alliance, of which NCC is a founding member to show how much more power the community has when we work together. And we will continue to cultivate our genuine relationships in the community and with the Traditional Owners of the Basin.

We will also raise awareness of the importance of Murray-Darling Basin health on the east coast, especially Sydney organising events on the coast that bring the issues of the Basin to where the legislative power lies. Our goal is to win the full implementation of the Connectivity Report's recommendations to restore the Darling/Baaka to health. This is our chance to let the rivers flow.