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Media Release

Ban Floodplain Harvesting Now

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Healthy Rivers Dubbo, a strong local voice for the rivers and communities of inland NSW is calling on Water Minister Rose Jackson to immediately ban the highly contentious form of water take - floodplain harvesting.

"If the State of NSW cannot enforce rules managing water take from inland floodplains, they must immediately ban the practice." Said Healthy Rivers Dubbo Convenor Melissa Gray.

Two recent court cases against the State of NSW have been won by irrigators. This shows that the regulatory system is unenforceable, and cannot be used to stop water theft.

Floodplain harvesting is the construction of long levee banks on the floodplain country of inland rivers that capture rainfall as it runs into a waterway, and floodwater as it leaves the banks of a river. Massive volumes of water are captured in this way.

"Healthy Rivers Dubbo is calling for Minister Rose Jackson to immediately ban floodplain water take. If Minister Jackson cannot stop water thieves, she cannot meet her duty to uphold the law." Said Gray.

Floodplain water take is an extremely controversial practice and has widely been rejected in impacted communities. NSW floodplain harvesting licencing policy was disallowed several times in NSW parliament.

Floodplain harvesting has been identified by many reports and studies as a leading factor in numerous mass fish kill events and the dramatic decline in wetland health and water bird populations.

Quotes attributable to Melissa Gray, Convenor of Healthy Rivers Dubbo

"The volume of floodplain water reaching downstream rivers has reduced by over 90% since irrigation has been developed. This has had a devastating impact on inland rivers, wetlands and communities." Said Gray

"Downstream is suffering so that the inflated profits of the cotton industry upstream can be maintained. Traditional owners cannot meet their obligations to protect cultural heritage for future generations.

"Diverse local economies like recreational fishing, irrigated food production, floodplain grazing, birdwatching and tourism are being sacrificed."

"Inland rivers need at least one flow every year even in the biggest drought, that is how the Darling/Baaka River basin evolved over millions of years.

"Rivers need a heart beat, and floodplain harvesting has taken the heartbeat of inland rivers.

"These ancient waterways work with Country and with communities and have done for thousands of years, sustaining life and environment.

ENDS —

Media contact, available for comment - Melissa Gray, 0431 471 310

Reference:

Budget Estimates PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 2 - HEALTH, Wednesday 19 August 2026, Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio areas WATER, HOUSING, HOMELESSNESS, MENTAL HEALTH, AND YOUTH