

NSW Greens - Darling River Policy Initiative



1) Return water to the Darling River

The Greens want to see significant amounts of water returned to the Darling River. Small and moderate rain events should be allowed to flow into the river and make their way downstream. Too much irrigation and flood diversion works are occurring upstream, with additional water for mining and coal seam gas a new concern. Restoring water volumes to the river is a more sensible way to provide water security for users than expensive engineering schemes.

The NSW Government should seek to purchase Cubbie Station and return a significant amount of water to Darling System. Cubbie Station uses 200 gigalitres of water per year on average, and can use up to 500 gigalitres in a year. Not only does it divert a significant portion of flows in the Culgoa River, but flood diversion works also divert a large area of catchment into Cubbie Station's dams.

The Greens support the NSW Government purchasing Cubbie Station and transitioning it away from cotton with water licences being used to return water to the Darling River to ensure flows down the entire length of the river. We believe such a purchase is an economical way to return flows to the river, improve river health and improve water security for downstream users.

2) A downstream weir for Wilcannia in 2015

The Greens want to see a new downstream weir built for Wilcannia in 2015. The current weir is leaking and upstream of town meaning the river through town is very low or non-existent during dry times. A new downstream weir will provide better water quality for residents of Wilcannia, provide for recreation, swimming, fishing and cultural uses, as well as provide an opportunity for small scale horticultural irrigation for local food supply.

There has been a campaign for a new downstream weir in Wilcannia for at least 20 years. The Greens want to have funds committed, not only for feasibility studies, but to actually construct a new weir with an appropriate fish ladder.

3) Improved management of Menindee Lakes and local consultation

The Greens believe Menindee Lakes are a valuable environmental, economic and recreational resource, as well as an important source of water supply for the city of Broken Hill. Management of the Menindee Lakes should be rebalanced to ensure the well-being of the people of Menindee and Broken Hill is prioritised. This means the Murray Darling Basin Authority and Water NSW should factor in the value of the Lakes to the local population and environment, when considering releases for downstream uses – rather than viewing the Lakes as simply a source of water loss through evaporation.

The Greens support more local involvement in the management of the Menindee Lakes System, this should include revising whether water levels in Lake Menindee and Cawndilla

are included in threshold calculations and setting a water volume threshold trigger for increased local consultation in the management of the Menindee Lakes System.

4) Support for the 'We Want Action' plan

The Greens support the plan drafted by the 'We Want Action' group, including raising the height of weir 32, improving the connection between Lake Pamamaroo and Copi Hollo, and investigating the feasibility of extending the current anabranch pipeline to weir 32.

The Greens share concerns that implementing bore water and associated desalination infrastructure will lead to a de-prioritisation of the health of the Menindee Lakes system and Broken Hill's water supply within the overall management of the Murray-Darling River system. In particular that it will allow increased water allocations upstream on the Darling River, and allow water from the Menindee Lakes System to be used more frequently to fulfil downstream needs, as either replacement for water from the Murray River, or at the expense of the Menindee Lakes System itself.

5) Reverse recent retrograde changes made by the Water Management Act 2014

The Water Management Bill 2014 made significant retrograde changes to water management in NSW that will be to the detriment of the Darling River and its downstream users.

These include:

- a) excluding post-2004 data from water management calculations – which effectively excludes the Millennium Drought and a changing climate. This means water storages will be emptied more quickly and recklessly, which will create a more dire situation when drought does strike.
- b) legalising illegal flood works and granting flood water rights. This means that significant amounts of water will be diverted or continue to be diverted from the Darling River for private use. The effect will mean that small and medium rain events will not make it to the lower Darling.
- c) Making supplementary water licences compensable, increasing the potential liability for tax payers, and additional pressure to provide increased allocations to irrigators and other water users.

These changes will lead to less water in the rivers, increased liabilities for taxpayers, and greater allocations of scarce resources leaving little for dry periods which are predicted to become more common with climate change. The Greens voted in parliament against these changes and will work for the changes to be repealed.

6) Restoring the buyback of water in the Murray Darling system to at least 2570 gigalitres

Restoring the buyback of water in the Murray Darling system to, at least the original 2750 gigalitres specified in the 2012 Murray Darling Basin Plan, which was subsequently reduced by the NSW Government to 1,500 gigalitres as a condition of NSW signing up to the plan.