



I N L A N D
R I V E R S
N E T W O R K

PO Box 216, DUBBO NSW 2830
ph 0428 817 282
email inlandriversnetwork@gmail.com
web inlandriversnetwork.org
ABN 34 373 750 383

Department of Climate Change, Energy, Environment and Water
GPO Box 3090
Canberra ACT 2601

SnowyDeedReview@dcceew.gov.au

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Submission

Independent Review of the Snowy Water Inquiry Outcomes Implementation Deed

The Inland Rivers Network (“IRN”) is a coalition of environment groups and individuals concerned about the degradation of the rivers, wetlands and groundwaters of the Murray-Darling Basin. It has been advocating for the conservation of rivers, wetlands and groundwater in the Murray-Darling Basin since 1991.

Member groups include the Australian Conservation Foundation; the Nature Conservation Council of NSW; the National Parks Association of NSW; Friends of the Earth; Central West Environment Council; and Healthy Rivers Dubbo.

IRN welcomes this needed review of current Snowy Water Outcomes Implementation Deed in order to enhance the health of the upper Murrumbidgee River, recognising the importance of an integrated approach that reflects the crucial role of water in sustaining ecological, social and economic vitality within the Murray-Darling Basin and indeed across Australia.

For the revision of the Snowy Water Implementation Deed to enhance river health outcomes in the Murrumbidgee River, IRN makes the following key recommendations, so that:

- There are a set enforceable targets that are informed by environmental, social and cultural water requirements and by climate projections.
- environmental flows are protected from extraction.
- Managers are allowed greater flexibility in how flows are delivered given the weather conditions.

- independent oversight and review points occur.
- There is regular public reporting on flows and river condition.

IRN has from its inception advocated for a flow regime that will deliver sufficient volume and quality to sustain core ecological river function, with capacity to vary delivery in tune with weather events sufficient to sustain riparian connectivity, essential flushing and overbank watering.

It is well recognised that the upper montane catchments of the Australian high country have been substantially modified over the past 200 years. The Snowy Mountains Scheme in particular has diverted 97% of the Snowy River flows into the upper Murrumbidgee, significantly affecting natural river flow patterns and biodiversity. Given the adverse effect of these changes on the river systems overall, there is need to improve the management regime, including through revision of the Deed.

It has been disappointing that despite the establishment of the Deed as an outcome of the Snowy Water Inquiry, environmental water delivery has rarely met its target. This is in part due to inbuilt constraints in existing water management arrangement with risk of further impact as a result of the Snowy 2.00 hydro-power scheme given that the Snowy Scheme is specifically exempted from complying with requirements of the Murray Darling Basin Plan.

For more information on this submission, please contact IRN at:
inlandriversnetwork@gmail.com