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MEDIA RELEASE

Rapid response needed to save parched Ramsar wetlands

The Inland Rivers Network today called on the NSW Premier and the Prime Minister to work together to rescue dying Ramsar wetlands when the Water Summit reconvenes this Friday.

This follows calls by landholders for the delisting of Ramsar wetlands from wetland custodians in the Gwydir and damning evidence contained in the State of the Environment Report released last week.

The Report says changes to waterways, including decades of taking far too much water out of rivers, have led to the loss of 90 per cent of floodplain wetlands in the Murray–Darling Basin.

“The wetlands in the Gwydir have been starved of water for too many years and are on the brink of collapse,” said Amy Hankinson, Coordinator of the Inland Rivers Network.

“The problem has been brought about from people bleeding the system to death, legally and illegally.”

“Many people have been draining the rivers and floodplains for free and without authorisation for many years – no where else is the problem so large. This stops the water from getting to parched wetlands and bleeds it out before it gets there.”

“This is not just a reaction to the drought – these farmers and the wetlands that they manage have been under artificial drought for years. This is not just affecting the environment, its hurting our farmers and their communities,” said Ms Hankinson.

“Its time to see some commitment to promises made for Ramsar wetlands and under the National Water Initiative – these iconic wetlands need protecting and we must return our rivers to sustainable levels of extraction.”

“The situation in the Gwydir is now critical – we need coordinated action from State and Federal Governments.”

“Those charged with delivering the National Water Initiative need to recognise that returning our rivers to health is essential for rural economies and communities. And Ramsar wetlands should be at the top of the list.”

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