



MEDIA RELEASE

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New NSW laws undercut water from rivers

Our rivers could be allowed to run dry in times of drought after the NSW Government passes new laws tonight that change the definition of environmental water, environment groups said today.

Professor Don White from Nature Conservation Council of NSW said, "The laws also invalidate an important High Court challenge that the NSW Conservation Council NSW (NCC) is running to secure environmental water for the internationally acclaimed Gwydir wetlands, in north west NSW."

"Under recent water reforms, it appears the lion's share of the public's water went to a few individuals and businesses that now own this public resource and can trade water on a private water market. The water sharing plans in place do not adequately protect the water source and the environment.

"The new laws undermine the intention of the original Water Management Act 2000 that aimed to protect the integrity of our water sources for all users," he said. It is important to recognize that healthy rivers are in everyone's interest," Professor White said.

Amy Hankinson from the Inland Rivers Network said, "With this bill, the Government is subverting the primary intentions of the Act – to give the environment priority in order to protect the water source. By changing the definition of environmental water, this bill calves out the Act's priority from the inside."

Arlene Buchan from the Australian Conservation Foundation said: "We all welcome the Premier's excellent decision earlier this week to invest \$105 million to buy water licenses to save stressed wetlands and waterways. However, this Bill is deeply disappointing, since it undermines the Act's aim of putting river health first," she said.

"A good mix of laws, community action and market solutions are needed to secure the state's water supply and protect and restore our wetlands and rivers. The water market will only work if underpinned by sound legislation," she concluded.

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