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Subject: SUBMISSION to the Draft Macquarie-Castlereagh Regional Water Strategy
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Thanking you for this opportunity to present to the Draft Macquarie-Castlereagh Regional Water Strategy.

From the outset I mention that from my time on the Darling River near Wilcannia I have seen firsthand the destructive actions of successive governments; their biased treatment of water and river systems very much in favour of extractive irrigation industries. All this to the detriment of Indigenous communities, smaller irrigation industries, town communities, floodplain graziers and river health. These actions have been well documented in the press, in numerous reports, inquiries and the SA Royal Commission.

I currently live near Dubbo and the Macquarie River and am a member of the Australian Floodplain Association. While I'm specifically addressing proposed changes to the Gingin weir, calls for more dams on our rivers are part of ongoing and destructive strategies favouring water extraction over river health. The proposed increased height of the Gingin dam and three other proposed structures similarly favour water extractions over river health.

The pricetag for the Gingin structure appears to be in the order of \$30 million. Those who stand to benefit from a dam at Gingin are privately owned industries, mainly cotton to the west of Dubbo between Narromine and Warren. This includes the American owned cotton agribusiness Auscott. Dubbo's water will continue to be supplied from Burrendong so townspeople and Indigenous communities and all others with a general human right to healthy rivers and water, stand to receive no benefit from the altered Gingin weir. The \$30 million of publically funded money is once again selectively funding extractive agribusinesses to the detriment of all other taxpayers.

Water Resource Plans and Water Sharing Plans are being finalised across the Murray Darling Basin. The MDBA needs to ensure that the level of water extraction complies with the guidelines of the Water Act (2007, Cth). The act requires that the most important and largest allocation of water is for the health of the river system, the water source, into the future. Water extractions on many of the basins in northern NSW and into Qld are already overallocated in favour of extractive agribusinesses. Increased extraction of water, as a result of an enlarged dam at Gingin (and three other proposed dams across NSW) is only adding to the impossibility of the MDBA complying with the Water Acts and assuring the voting public of the health of rivers into the future. The political landscape has altered considerably in the last two NSW state elections. The success of the Anybody but the Nats campaign was driven by the increasing destruction of our river systems; increasing periods of no flow, undrinkable town water, unprecedented fish kills, and an increasing understanding by the voting public of entrenched

water theft and fraud. In 2019 the large electorates of Murray and Barwon followed the seat of Orange, voting for the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers. Dugald Saunders (Nats) only won Dubbo in that same year by a slim margin. I mention this as the four proposed river infrastructures/ dams are all in National Party state and or Federal electorates. The Nationals persist with the outdated mantra that dams will drought proof Australia while amongst the voting public there's increased concern for environmental and river health and actively reducing drivers of global climate change. The four proposed dams / dam infrastructure changes and their electorates are:

Gingin weir; Dugald Saunders (State seat of Dubbo) and Mark Coulton (Fed seat of Parkes), Wyangala Dam; Angus Taylor (Fed seat of Hume), Dungowan Dam and Mole River Dam; Barnaby Joyce (Fed seat of New England) and Kevin Andrews (state seat of Tamworth)

It is mystifying that at a time when WSP/ WRP's are focused on meeting environmental water targets (while keeping powerful cotton lobbies happy) that these proposals from the Nationals to build more dams and keep massive amounts of water upstream are even being considered. With this in mind, positive alterations to Gingin weir could include rebuilding the ailing structure at its current height and installing the long awaited fishways that have funding allocated from Water NSW.

The proposed changes to the weir at Gingin will potentially hinder water flowing to the internationally recognised and Ramsar listed Macquarie Marshes downstream. Studies show that degradation to the marshes is increasing threatening native fish habitat, water bird breeding and downstream river systems.

The cotton industry in China has recently maintained that the Australian governments' water infrastructure spending is in fact subsidising Australian cotton. This money, part of the \$13 billion agreed by Australian taxpayers to bring the river systems back to health has been diverted they argue, for the exclusive benefit of extractive industries; creating larger dams, building infrastructures enabling water extraction. Once again with the Gingin and the other proposed dams, water extraction for the benefit of the few is being prioritised over river health, and all other water users. Water authorities must keep focussed on restoring the health of the Murray Darling Basin: the health of bird colonies, native fish and environmental systems.

I strongly support strengthening First Nations capacity, engagement and employment in water management and their ownership claims to water.

