

THE NATIONAL TRUST OF AUSTRALIA (NSW)

Draft Policy on Conservation of NSW Rivers and Groundwater Systems

Preamble

The National Trust has long argued for the conservation of the heritage and ecological values of rivers and their catchments in New South Wales. In **March, 1974** the Trust published “Regeneration of the Parramatta River and in **March, 1976** conducted a symposium “Planning the Future of the Hawkesbury River Valley.” In the 1980s/90s the National Trust campaigned for the protection of the Sydney Metropolitan, Woronora and Warragamba Inner Catchment Areas. In New South Wales and Australia inland water systems differ markedly from rivers in other parts of the world. While most rivers in the Northern Hemisphere and many other parts of the world are replenished annually by major snow melts, only rivers in the Australian Alps function in this manner. Australia’s greatest river system, the Murray Darling, has limited water input as it relies on runoff which is being captured and withheld, while simultaneously being subject to major water extraction, and this in the world’s driest continent. River and groundwater conservation policy has become urgent with scientific evidence of major and possibly catastrophic climatic changes in the future.

Many rivers and their valleys have been listed on the National Trust Register including Cox’s River – Hartley Valley (1986) and Kanimbla & Megalong Valleys (1986), Forbes River - Hastings Valley (1982), Hunter River Estuary (1976), Minnamurra River – Jamberoo Valley (1975), Kangaroo River – Kangaroo Valley (1975), Snowy River – Kosciusko Alpine Areas (1977), Lower Hawkesbury River (1988), Macquarie River – Macquarie Marshes (1985), Murray River –Murray Valley Flood Plain (1975), Goulburn River/Hunter River – Muswellbrook/Jerrys Plains (1985), Myall River – Myall Lakes (1977), Parramatta and Lane Cove Rivers (1983), Karuah River – Port Stephens (1978), Gloucester River – Avon River – Wards River – Stroud Gloucester Valley (1976), Tweed River (Tweed River Valley), Cataract River – Cordeaux River – Avon River – Nepean River – Woronora Plateau (1988), Macdonald River – Macdonald Valley/Wollombi Valley (1977), Turon River – Hill End (1988), Wolgan River – Wolgan Valley (1976), Georges River – Gwawley Bay (2004) & Kyle Bay (2014), Jenolan River – Jenolan Caves. The National Trust Register Listing Reports set out the historical, scenic, social, cultural and scientific values of the listed rivers.

On 29 January, 2019, the Murray-Darling Basin Royal Commission Report¹ was presented. The Report notes that it “has drought and climate change woven into all its considerations.” The Royal Commission Report concluded that the Murray Darling Basin Authority “is required to take into account climate change to accord with Australia’s international obligations, satisfy the principles of Ecologically Sustainable Development and to meet the requirement to draft the Basin Plan and exercise its other functions based on the best available scientific knowledge. Chapter 4 of the Basin Plan (Identification and management of risks to Basin water resources), as currently made, does not come close to meeting these requirements.” Also on 29 January, 2019, the Worldwide Threat Assessment² was presented to a US Senate Select Committee, outlining the impacts of climate change and poor governance practices increasing water and food insecurity around the world.

On 8 February, 2019, the Chief Judge of the NSW Land and Environment Court rejected a proposed open cut coal mine for coking-coal for steel-making³ saying that an open-cut coal mine “in this part of the Gloucester Valley would be in the wrong place at the wrong time.” It was the wrong place because of “this scenic and cultural landscape”.

Policy

1. The National Trust strongly endorses the view that the rivers of New South Wales their catchments, and the State’s groundwater systems have historic, scenic, social, cultural and scientific values; have long been recognised as “country” by the Aboriginal people; were highly valued by early settlers; and continue to be valued by current communities.
2. The National Trust will continue to champion, through National Trust Register Listing, the values of the State’s rivers, catchments and groundwater systems and will strongly lobby for the protection of those values using conservation management best practices, supported by the participation of a well-informed community.
3. The Trust will pursue governments at all levels to act upon the irrefutable mounting evidence of increasing and damaging impacts of climate change and its exacerbating effects on climate hazards such as extreme weather, higher temperatures, droughts, floods, bushfires, storms, sea level rise and soil degradation which threaten human populations, ecological communities, property and infrastructure, health, water and food security.
4. The Trust will call for improved governance of rivers, catchments and groundwater systems to cope with the unpredictability of changes in frequency and variability of heatwaves, droughts and floods.
5. The Trust will endeavour to be better informed so as to understand, recognise and able to respond meaningfully to the threats posed to Aboriginal communities’ culture, by the impacts of climate change and poor governance of our State’s rivers and catchments.
6. The Trust will seek to better identify the social, cultural, historic and industrial heritage values of smaller towns in regional NSW and the pressures that they now face through water supply uncertainties, climate hazards and the impacts of climate change.
7. The Trust will put increased emphasis on recognising the role and importance of groundwater systems and their scientific and historic values, and the need to ensure that they are not damaged or degraded.

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Approved by National Trust Board:

¹ Murray-Darling Basin Royal Commission Report, Government of South Australia, 29 January 2019

² Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community, US Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 29 January 2019 (<https://www.odni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/2019-ATA-SFR---SSCI.pdf>)

³ Gloucester Resources Limited v Minister for Planning [2019] NSWLEC 7, <https://www.caselaw.nsw.gov.au/decision/5c59012ce4b02a5a800be47f>