



20th October 2025

Murray Watt
senator.watt@aph.gov.au

Dear Minister Watt,

RE: Current Review of the Snowy Water Inquiry Outcomes Implementation Deed (SWIOID).

As you are aware, the SWIOID was established to increase the environmental flows to rivers dammed by the Snowy Hydro Scheme. We are writing to advocate for an increase in the volume of environmental flows to the upper Murrumbidgee River and all Snowy Montane Rivers. The review of SWIOID presents a valuable opportunity to strengthen governance, restore natural flow regimes to rivers that have been deprived of sufficient flows for decades, and enhance ecosystem protection in preparation for increasing water insecurity driven by climate change (Isobel Bender, 2022).

The greatly reduced flows in the upper Murrumbidgee River are a cause for great concern. The diversion of 90-99% of the headwaters of the Murrumbidgee at Tantangara dam has caused irreparable damage including the extinction of multiple fish species and has depleted water quality and security for downstream communities (ARRC 2025, McGuire and Pittock 2025). The environmental release target is rarely met for this river and river health is rapidly declining as a result (McGuire and Pittock 2025). Increasing environmental release volumes is crucial for restoring river health, alongside improved governance, water management rules and habitat restoration projects.

Climate change is putting stress on rivers as the climate warms, the frequency and severity of droughts increases as rainfall becomes more variable. Limiting river flows exacerbates the effects of climate change (Kreibich, 2024). Stagnant rivers result in increased levels of mosquitoes, reduced quality of drinking and irrigation water (Pittock, 2011) and an increase in the effects of bush fires (van Dijk, 2006). These risks are of great concern to residents. Restoring environmental flows is particularly important in this context to protect native species and ecosystem health.

The Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters of the upper Murrumbidgee have a long history of living alongside and caring for the river. We ask that you engage in genuine collaboration with First Nations during the review process and in all future stages of implementation, respect their traditional knowledge, work to restore water rights and enable First Nations participation in water management. This is important to increase Connection to Country and strengthen community and cultural wellbeing.

We ask that you take this opportunity for a new approach to river management for the upper Murrumbidgee and Snowy Montane Rivers, one that prioritises river health and best practice management. We ask that you recognise the critical role the Snowy Montane rivers and the upper Murrumbidgee River play in maintaining a secure water source for the ACT and surrounding NSW region.

In the process of updating the SWIOID and implementing new governance arrangements, we ask that you take advantage of this opportunity for a new approach to river management for the upper Murrumbidgee and Snowy Montane Rivers and ensure the following new arrangements:

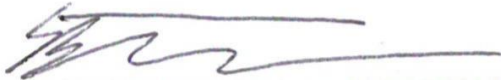
1. Set **enforceable minimum flow requirements** that are based on scientific advice regarding water requirements for river health and climate change projections.
2. Include inbuilt **independent review** systems and public reporting.
3. Provide **full transparency** in the review of the SWIOID, meaningful engagement with Traditional Owners and First Nations organisations and accessible public reporting of the review outcomes.
4. Invest in long-term and **consistent scientific monitoring** of the upper Murrumbidgee River and all other Snowy Montane Rivers.
5. Demonstrate **best practice environmental water management**, including active and adaptive management, continuous long-term monitoring, public reporting and release of data, and community engagement.
6. Review issues not only for the upper Murrumbidgee River, but for the Snowy River and **all other montane rivers** experiencing the impacts of reduced flows and declining health.

We want to see a better future for our rivers, with increased flows, recovery of threatened species, improved water quality, enhanced water security and healthy communities. The review of the SWIOID is a rare opportunity to make this future a reality and I/we ask that you work to ensure the best possible outcomes for river health and our communities.

Thank you for considering this matter. Our rivers deserve to be treated with best practice management to ensure resilience and water security in a changing climate.

If you or your staff would like to discuss this matter further, please don't hesitate to contact us via director@conservationcouncil.org.au, or 0423 390 887.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Simon Copland', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Simon Copland (Executive Director)
ACT Conservation Council

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Craig Wilkins', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Craig Wilkins (National Co-Director)
Murray Darling Conservation Alliance

References/Further Reading

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