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21 January 2021

The Hon. Keith Pitt MP
Minister for Resources, Water and Northern Australia
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Minister Pitt

Our Murumbidgee River is dying.

During summer 2019-2020 the Murrumbidgee River ceased flowing through our country even though there was water flowing in the mountains. Silver perch, once an important food source to the indigenous people of the region, are now considered extinct from the upper Murrumbidgee River.

In 2019 the ACT Government published their State of Environment report that included a case study depicting the impact of upstream water management on Murrumbidgee River flow. The illustrated difference in the flow that would have occurred under indigenous stewardship and the effect of contemporary water resource management is a stark contrast that cannot be ignored and is killing our river.

The Australian and NSW governments are developing water resource plans to protect and restore our riverine environments. Water resource plans are required under the Basin Plan to maintain, or at least not compromise, priority ecological assets and functions. Water plans are only required to *have regard* to indigenous interests!

There is some alignment with cultural and ecological values intended to be protected under water resource plans: the fish we eat; significant cultural sites; cultural water practices; and animals. Waterways are our pathways into the mountains that followed songlines that are tens of thousands of years old and supported us to engage in our cultural ceremonies, trade, initiation, marriage and cultural responsibilities.

Ngunnawal people see our waterways and Country dying and this is without doubt, supported by western science, a result of current upstream water management in the upper Murrumbidgee valley. Upstream water management is compromising both the ecological and cultural values and is also impacting our people's health and well-being.

And yet, the Murray-Darling Basin Authority is asking the Ngunnawal Traditional Custodians, through the Murray and Lower Darling River Indigenous Nations (MDLRIN), to endorse the NSW Murrumbidgee Water Resource Plan. The Murrumbidgee water plan indicates that our river will experience increased periods of no flow or very low flows. In essence, the Ngunnawal people are

being asked to accept the continued degradation of our waterway, our landscape and our cultural being.

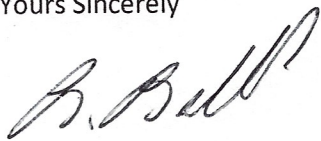
The National Water Initiative establishes a commitment by all governments to include Indigenous people in water management. The NSW government's engagement of the Ngunnawal Traditional Custodians on the Murrumbidgee water plan has been limited rather than fully inclusive and extensive. The Ngunnawal Traditional Custodians cannot and will not agree to a water plan that will only reinforce derisive attitudes toward involving Ngunnawal people in water planning and that will continue to compromise our cultural values. **This plan does not present a pathway for protecting our indigenous values and providing access to water.**

The Snowy Hydro Scheme was a nation building infrastructure project that is soon to be expanded. This infrastructure has been important to light our homes, but electricity generation has come at a significant cost to river health and our cultural connection to the Murrumbidgee River. The current state of the Murrumbidgee River only accentuates the failure of governments to balance economic, social, cultural and environmental interests. The Australian Government's ownership of Snowy Hydro creates an opportunity to correct this imbalance through the provision of cultural flows.

Our Murabidji is dying! Ngunnawal people managed water with an understanding that it was a shared resource flowing through our Country and our neighbours Country. We knew what we did on our Country would impact our neighbours and therefore maintained our waterways to ensure that our neighbours were not detrimentally impacted. Little can be said for the NSW Government in their care and regard of our people's water rights. Our Ngunnawal Country needs a sustainable and stable water flow in the Murrumbidgee River, or it will die along with the river.

We need a plan that will return more water back to our river from the Snowy Hydro Scheme and that protects the river flow from extraction. Such a plan needs to support and protect our cultural values, cultural practices, and cultural uses. We ask for governments to turn their attention to the plight of the upper Murrumbidgee River and the Ngunnawal Traditional Custodians and accept that it is a shared responsibility between governments to protect and maintain our waterways for ALL people.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Bull', written in a cursive style.

Ngunnawal Traditional Custodians