

I would like to make a submission on the *Consultation Draft - Fitzroy–Derby Water Resource Management Plans*.

While I support much of the proposed water plan, I do not support allocating billions of litres of this precious water to broad acre irrigation that will only benefit a few very wealthy individuals to the detriment of the river and the environment and not provide any substantial economic benefit to the majority of the Kimberley community.

Broad acre irrigation for crops such as cotton will result in the broad acre clearing of native vegetation and extensive loss of habitat on over 160,000 ha of largely pastoral leases that technically belong to the state government and therefore the traditional owners and Australian people. It will also result in the application of huge volumes of fertilizers and pesticides over that extensive area and result in soil erosion that will then ultimately result in runoff, sediment and pollution making their way into the tributaries and ultimately the Martuwarra Fitzroy River. All this environmental destruction and vandalism to benefit a few very wealthy individuals to supplement their greed.

The water must be allocated toward protecting the Martuwarra Fitzroy River itself, which means leaving it in the ground to protect and support the ground water dependant ecosystems include stygofauna that live and depend on the groundwater as well as supply the springs and waterholes of the river during the dry season and potentially using some of it to replace surface water extraction licences to prevent the mass fish kills that have occurring in recent years due to over extraction. Any remaining water within the Kimberley must be restricted to stock and domestic, and potential sustainable tourism developments, not wasted on broad acre irrigation for crops such as cotton.

If any available water does exist, considered in a far more precautionary manner than currently applied, this should not be immediately allocated out but rather kept and be made available for any future sustainable tourism developments that would then provide a much greater economic benefit to the broader Kimberley community not just a few wealthy individuals.

I urge the WA Government to strengthen protection of the National Heritage listed Martuwarra Fitzroy River through this plan. The Martuwarra is one of Australia's last great living rivers and is central to the culture, law and livelihoods of Traditional Owners, as well as the health of regional communities, wildlife and the iconic Kimberley coast.

I welcome the government's stated commitment in the draft plan to **no surface water extraction and no dams**. Delivering on this commitment in the final plan would reflect the wishes of the consistently loud community voices in support of strong protections for the Martuwarra.

Embedding this policy commitment into the final water plan would also recognise the river's outstanding values and prevent some of the most damaging mistakes seen elsewhere in Australia being repeated on the Martuwarra. Protecting the river floods is critical to preserving the natural and cultural values of the river, including its role as a last stronghold for the critically-endangered freshwater sawfish that only breeds in large flood years.

A key risk the plan must address is groundwater. If groundwater is over-allocated, it creates the conditions for large-scale irrigated agriculture to take hold in the Fitzroy catchment. Across Australia and globally, this pathway has led to rivers being slowly drained, ecosystems collapsing and local communities losing control – outcomes most clearly seen in the Murray-Darling system.

I urge the WA Government to strengthen the draft plan by:

- **Locking in the commitment to no further surface water take and no dams**
- **Significantly limiting groundwater extraction to prevent large-scale irrigated agriculture taking over**
- **Embedding strong monitoring, enforcement and transparency**
- **Supporting Traditional Owners rights and involvement as partners, including genuine decision-making role in water licensing and governance, and monitoring and compliance.**

Getting this plan right is a step towards protecting one of Australia's last great free-flowing rivers, shows we are learning from past national failures and choosing a future that doesn't repeat them.

The Martuwarra still flows freely, and that gives us a chance to do things differently. Groundwater is what keeps the river alive through the long dry season, feeding pools, springs and wetlands that people, fish and species like the critically endangered sawfish depend on. Pumping groundwater in the dry season can show up months later as shrinking pools, and recovery in a boom and bust system like the Martuwarra can take many years.

That is why the plan must start by **significantly limiting groundwater take on a precautionary basis**, to avoid repeating these mistakes before they occur. Acting early is far safer, cheaper and effective than trying to fix the damage after it's been done.

Locally led development across the catchment should be supported, and there are many opportunities for partnerships with communities, and particularly Traditional Owners that do not rely on extraction of water.

An essential safeguard in getting this right is a **strong, well-resourced ongoing role for Traditional Owners in water licensing, monitoring and decision-making**. This must

be a pre-condition for any future ground water extraction. Traditional Owners hold deep knowledge of how the river behaves and are best placed to identify early signs of harm. Embedding shared decision-making is one of the most effective ways to reduce risk, to address shortcomings highlighted in the *2025 WA Auditor General's Performance Audit — Regulation of Water Licences* and protect the river for the long term. The role of Traditional Owners in water licensing and management decisions is also crucial to preserving the National Heritage Listed cultural values of the river, which include groundwater.

I urge the WA Government to listen to the community, to use this water plan as a milestone towards protecting the river by making commitments on next steps beyond this plan to ensure long term and legally binding protections for the river and to work with Traditional Owners on a sustainable development plan that delivers for local people.

Yours sincerely,

Yvonne Ingeme