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Have your say - Protect the Martuwarra Fitzroy

Act now to protect the Martuwarra Fitzroy River, one of the Australia's last free-flowing rivers and home to critically endangered freshwater sawfish. The WA Government has released its draft water plan that will shape the future of the Martuwarra for generations. What happens next will determine whether it remains a living river or is opened up to large-scale extraction.

Make your submission today to help protect the river for everyone.

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Please consider this my submission to the *Fitzroy--Derby Draft Water Resource Management Plan – Choosing a Better Pathway Towards Protection for the Martuwarra*.

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**
- **Protecting groundwater from large-scale extraction to prevent mass irrigated agriculture taking over the Kimberley**
- **Supporting Traditional Owners' rights, including genuine decision-making role in licensing, monitoring and governance.**

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,

[Your name will be added automatically]

SEND NOW

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SPEAK UP FOR THE MARTUWARRA – BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE

The Martuwarra-Fitzroy River is the lifeblood of the Kimberley.

It sustains culture, communities and Country.

It is home to critically-endangered sawfish and one of the last free-flowing rivers in Australia.

Right now, it's all at risk.

The WA government has released a draft water plan for the Martuwarra catchment and thirsty industries like large-scale irrigation and fracking are pushing to take more water.

This water plan could stop that.

The government is accepting submissions – but only until 5pm Tuesday 30 June.

Your submission matters! Together we can show the strong community mandate to protect the Martuwarra for everyone.

Take action now!

We've made it easy, use this form to have your say today.

Read the WA Government's draft Fitzroy-Derby plan here. (<https://consult.dwer.wa.gov.au/water-policy/consultation-draft-fitzroy-derby-water-resources/>)

Campaign Partners



(<http://www.ccwa.org.au/>)



(<http://www.wwf.org.au>)



(<http://www.marineconservation.org.au/>)



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