

Media Release
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MLDRIN applauds legal practitioners and academics who signed open letter supporting First Nations water rights

MLDRIN, a self-determined, First Nation owned organization, extends its thanks to the fifty-plus legal practitioners and academics, including some of the country's leading barristers', who signed an open letter to Members of the Federal Parliament asking them to urgently address Indigenous water injustice in the Murray-Darling Basin.

The group highlighted that a Bill that is currently before Parliament which seeks to amend the *Water Act 2007* fails – once again – to address the rights and interests of over 40 Indigenous Nations across the Basin. They also noted that it and the Act more generally inconsistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP), which was endorsed by Australia in 2009.

MLDRIN strongly endorses the letter and in particular its assertion that the proposed amendments to the Act entrenches a water management framework that systematically excludes and discriminates against First Nations. The existing framework also deprives First Nations of the opportunity to contribute to the health of the Basin and Basin communities.

Grant Rigney, Chairperson of MLDRIN, said: "I am buoyed by the support of so many legal practitioners and academics. They say what we already know. The *Water Act (2007)* and the Restoring our Rivers Bill, fails to recognise our rights as First Nations people. Now is the time for the Senate to right the wrongs of the original Act."

Grant Rigney further stated: “the rights of First Nations need to be included in the proposed amendments to the Act now. We have been advocating for years for just changes to the Act. We should not have to wait until a further review in 2027 to achieve water justice for First Nations.

A delay would mean that water justice for First Nations people is again put on the back burner.”

Water lawyer Dr Emma Carmody, who has worked with MLDRIN and other First Nations groups in the MDB, noted that “the Bill that is currently before Parliament is a tangible opportunity to finally begin to address Indigenous water dispossession and injustice in the Basin, including by implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

“The Australian Parliament has an opportunity, right now, to demonstrate its commitment to addressing the rights and interests of the Basin’s 40 plus First Nations. Reform at the national level would also send a strong signal to all states and territories to follow suite and take meaningful steps to address Indigenous water injustice in their respective jurisdictions.”

Dr Erin O’Donnell, University of Melbourne Law School, stated that “The pathways to water justice are clear. Basin Nations have consistently argued for greater power in the care and management of waterscapes as well as increased water rights. We are only waiting on the political will to act – and the Australian Parliament now has the chance to take this much needed first step.”

MLDRIN is a representative confederation comprising delegates from more than 20 Indigenous Nations in the southern part of the Murray Darling Basin. Since 1998 MLDRIN has worked to provide a united voice to advance First Nations water justice in the Basin.

The letter signed by legal practitioners and academics is [add link](#)

Media contact:

Karmen Jobling (0456 811 155)