



Media Release

22 January 2019

Starts – Citizens’ Inquiry into the Health of the Darling River and Menindee Lakes, tours Western NSW from 19-28 March

News about the steadily deteriorating state of the Darling River has reached national and international audiences in the past few weeks, with First Nations Peoples, local communities, farmers and concerned citizens speaking out in horror about what is happening to them and their region, and what has been happening for many years to the Darling River, which is the life blood of their ecosystems and communities alike.

From 19-28 March 2019, people who reside in far-western NSW are invited to attend and to give their testimony to The Citizens’ Inquiry into the Health of The Darling River and Menindee Lakes. All people from communities affected by the poor state of the Darling River are invited.

Public hearings are being held in Mildura, Wentworth, Broken Hill, Bourke and Walgett. The Inquiry will also hold meetings and take evidence at Menindee and Wilcannia as part of their tour. Dates and venues for the hearings will be announced soon – www.tribunal.org.au

This is a chance for everyone in the west to have a say about the management of the Darling and Menindee Lakes and how it has affected their life, family and community.

Dr Michelle Maloney, environmental lawyer and Chairperson of the Citizens’ Inquiry said –

“This Citizens’ Inquiry is being organised to ensure community concerns are heard and recorded, so that people’s suggestions for ways forward can be taken seriously.”

“People in Australia and around the world have been sickened by the images of dead fish, emaciated animals, brown drinking water and people suffering along the Darling River.”

“Governments and corporations are not listening or responding urgently enough. It’s up to all of us to work together to support the people, communities, and all the ecosystems of the Darling River Basin.”

“Through the Citizens’ Inquiry, we can help give local communities a strong voice to create social and ecological justice. The hearings will enable local residents to present potential solutions, and move towards reforming the legal and power structures that have brought the Darling River to its present tragic state,” says Dr. Maloney.

The 2019 Citizens’ Inquiry into the health of the Darling River and Menindee Lakes was one of the recommendations that came out of the 2018 Australian Peoples’ Tribunal into the

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Impacts of industrial-scale Agriculture on Community and Nature's Rights, held in Brisbane on 27 October 2018.

The Citizens' Inquiry will provide a safe, fair and unbiased forum for all members of affected western communities to share personal testimony about their lives and the state of the Darling River and Menindee Lakes. In doing so they will share concerns and suggestions for a sustainable way to the future.

The Citizens' Inquiry is an independent, non-government, civil society initiative, created and managed by concerned citizens – including community leaders, human rights lawyers and First Nations Elders - who are volunteering their time to support communities affected by the declining health of the Darling River. The Inquiry is a Special Hearing of the Australian Peoples' Tribunal for Community and Nature's Rights, which is run voluntarily by environmental and human rights lawyers to support communities.

An invitation and guidelines for submissions

People who live in regions and towns connected to or associated with the Darling River and Menindee Lakes can participate in the Citizens' Inquiry in two ways:

1 – You can submit written or recorded audio/visual recorded testimony to the Inquiry, any time before 30th March 2019 at the Inquiry website - www.tribunal.org.au

2 – People are also invited to share their testimony at one of the public hearings in western NSW. If you want to give testimony at one of the public hearings, you can register to do so at the Citizens' Inquiry website. www.tribunal.org.au

The Inquiry's focus is on the personal experience of people who live along the Darling River, as well as personal testimonies and evidence from scientists engaged in research and monitoring of the Darling and its ecosystems. Lawyers with knowledge and understanding of current governance systems for the Darling River and Menindee Lakes are also being encouraged to contribute.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

If you wish to submit written or recorded testimony, please respond to any of, or all of the following 2019 Citizens Inquiry into Health on the Darling River and Menindee Lakes - Terms of Reference:

- Are you reliant on the Darling River for drinking water, household water use, business use and/or farming?
- What is the current state of the Darling where you live? (Describe what you see.)
- What are the impacts of the Darling River on your personal and family life and your community or township?

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- What are the impacts of the Darling River on your personal business and your community economies?
- What can you see as being the impacts of the zero-flows of the Darling River on the biodiversity and natural systems that make up the river and connected waterways, catchments and ecosystems?
- In your view and understanding, what are the prime causes of the current state of the Darling River Basin?
- In your view, what could or needs to be happening to restore the Darling River and its human and natural communities to a sustainable good health?

Written and pre-recorded testimonies can be submitted to the Inquiry at any time before 30 March, via the Citizens' Inquiry website – www.tribunal.org.au

The Inquiry will compile all testimonies, photographic evidence and statements in a report with recommendations to New South Wales, Queensland, Victorian and South Australian and Federal Governments by May/June 2019.

For further information about the *2019 Citizens' Inquiry into the Health on the Darling River and Menindee Lakes*, please contact Dr Michelle Maloney, at tribunal@earthlaws.org.au

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