

MEDIA RELEASE – 9 December 2022

NSW Government leads Australia with Progressive Legislation to Heal our Waterways

A landmark regulatory amendment has put the NSW Government in the forefront of environmental governance reform, according to the Mulloon Institute's (TMI) Chairman, Gary Nairn AO.

Acting on TMI's direct submission, last week the State Environmental Planning Policy was amended to smooth the path for installation of natural structures to repair degraded streams, known as 'Landscape Rehydration Infrastructure'. The amendment removes the need for a Development Application from Councils, a time-consuming and costly process currently preventing critical land restoration projects from proceeding across Australia.

This change does not remove oversight from such projects. All state-based environmental and water regulations will still apply. What has changed, is the simplification of the approvals pathway and the reduction of costs and time borne by applicants.

"Our waterways are severely degraded, behaving more like drains than the lifeblood of our landscapes," Gary Nairn said. "Landholders and conservationists who want to repair them confront the same regulatory hurdles as those who want to build roads, supermarkets and housing developments, it's absurd. We need a new governance regime for land restoration. This is a breakthrough step in that direction".

The NSW Government has defined Landscape Rehydration Infrastructure Works as, 'works involving placing permeable structures on the bed of a stream to reduce erosion and maintain or restore flows for ecological purposes'.

"These kinds of projects are not novel or untested," says TMI CEO Carolyn Hall. "Around the world they have proven effective in hydrating vast landscapes, building soil and biodiversity, mitigating floods, halting erosion, re-establishing wetlands and driving carbon sequestration.

Every day landholders ask us for help with landscapes that are so degraded they no longer store moisture - even flooding rains don't hydrate them but simply erode them further. Before these landscapes were cleared of trees for agriculture, they were remarkably good at cycling available water on our arid continent. These structures simply slow things down and give those magical natural processes time to rebuild absorbent, resilient landscapes. We are truly inspired by the leadership of the NSW Government driving this change for landholders," she said.

It is likely this will be a tipping point, leading to reform in other states. But the Mulloon Institute is pushing for more, lobbying for a National Code of Practice for Landscape Restoration and Rehydration. This would integrate the many environmental safeguards that protect water quality, biodiversity and cultural heritage into a streamlined compliance process.

Environmental Law Scholar Dr Gerry Bates is contributing to the draft Code: "There is such urgency now, as the State of Environment Report tells us. If we want to heal our environments, we need an outcomes-focused approach that is easy to navigate. What we have now is a tangled spaghetti of approvals processes stalling hundreds of worthwhile projects. Many other sectors have a Code-compliant approach, why don't we have one for Environmental Restoration?" he asked.

Gary Nairn congratulated Planning Minister Anthony Roberts, and former Minister Rob Stokes, and their staff at the Department of Planning and the Environment. "Changing legislation isn't easy, but it is absolutely necessary if we are to adapt to climate change and achieve real benefits for the land. This initiative has the support of all sides of politics, and farmers and environmentalists alike – it's a win-win for the Australian bush. We have the

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momentum now, 2023 is going to be a game-changer for Environmental Restoration.”

- ENDS -



IMAGE – Before (top, 2018) and after (bottom, 2020) installation of a ‘landscape rehydration infrastructure’ at Westview Farm in the Southern Tablelands, NSW, as part of the catchment-scale [Mulloon Rehydration Initiative](#).

DOWNLOAD high resolution images here: <https://themullooninstitute.org/photos-for-media-release>

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