



## GWYDIR WATER SHARING PLAN

**Mr BRENDAN MOYLAN (Northern Tablelands) (19:19):** I raise some of my concerns about the draft *Water Sharing Plan for the Gwydir Unregulated River Water Sources 2025*, which was released on 4 November. In my electorate, water plays a crucial role, from a social and cultural perspective and also an economic perspective. Water sharing plans, as most in this House would know, provide the framework by which all users of water—be it stock and domestic water, town water, industrial water, environmental water or irrigation water—can access their lawful entitlements. The plans outline conditions designed to equally share water between licensed users, to ensure that each user of water in each valley has access to their separate water entitlements. The water sharing plans are designed to facilitate long-term limits and to ensure that socio-economic, environmental and cultural outcomes are achieved.

Water is a difficult policy area. Everyone in this place would agree on at least that point. One issue has arisen in the draft water sharing plan for my valley, the Gwydir Valley, whose headwaters are at Copeton Dam, outside of Inverell, and which is essentially a flat river delta that terminates west of Moree, towards Collarenebri. The issue is that that plan has included an additional 327 wetlands within that valley. The mapping used to identify those 327 additional wetlands has not been based on ground truth. Quite frankly, it could not be. The difficulty this raises is from not only a water user's perspective but also a primary production perspective, particularly in circumstances where the Government is planning to give the native vegetation regulatory [NVR] map legal effect. The plan identifies an additional 327 wetlands, most of which are on private property, which will have flow-on effects—no pun intended—for the NVR map, particularly because those wetlands are located in areas that are otherwise unregulated country as defined by the NVR map.

A number of water users in my electorate have written to me and the Minister. As a result of that correspondence, a webinar was offered on 19 November, which is great. I thank the Government for that. There will be a meeting in Bingara on 27 November 2024 about entitlement holders and access rules. That meeting will be useful but, unfortunately, will not address the issue of the 327 new wetlands, whose basis no-one can understand. No-one can understand how they have been defined as wetlands, or why areas that include stock and domestic dams that have been there for many years are now classified as wetlands.

This issue is in not only my valley. I am told that, for example, in the valley in the electorate of the member for Barwon, south of mine, an additional 273 wetlands have been identified in the draft water sharing plan for the Namoi, which will have impacts for water users right across that valley. So it is an issue. This Parliament does not have a good history when it comes to mapping. I will be writing to the Minister, but we need to make sure that these new wetlands are, in fact, wetlands because, if they are not and if they are mapped incorrectly, it will have huge issues for communities across my electorate.