

Media Release

NRAR steps up efforts to prevent water law breaches in lower Murray

The Natural Resources Access Regulator (NRAR) is ramping up early intervention efforts to prevent water law breaches in the lower Murray, where irrigation-reliant permanent crops like nut and fruit trees are expanding.

NRAR has flagged this growth—particularly downstream of the Barmah-Millewa Reach—as a risk, especially during dry periods when water prices spike.

NRAR Director of Regulatory Initiatives Dr Andrew Howe said the regulator would take a low-tolerance approach to water-take offences but was giving growers fair warning to prepare.

“Our staff have recently met with peak industry bodies to ensure they understand the risks and the high likelihood of detection if rules are broken,” Dr Howe said.

“We’ll also contact more than 300 licence holders with high-water-needs permanent crops to encourage planning for adverse conditions.”

Dr Howe said NRAR’s research shows many growers are not adequately prepared for increased water demand.

“The risk is that supply pressures will combine and lead to non-compliance. That’s exactly what we aim to prevent,” he said.

“Being prepared, especially in dry conditions, is the best way to avoid issues with the regulator.”

Over the next year, NRAR will actively monitor for unlawful water use in the southern Murray-Darling Basin, targeting offences such as:

- overdrawn water accounts
- failure to pre-order water
- taking water with non-functioning meters
- unapproved water works

NRAR will use satellite and remote sensing technology to flag sites where water demand may exceed allocations, triggering rapid investigations when potential breaches are detected.

“Now is the time to act—understand your licence and approval conditions and have a plan for dry conditions,” Dr Howe said.

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NRAR is the NSW water regulator. We enforce water laws throughout the state to ensure water is used lawfully and shared fairly.

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