

Lowbidgee Flood Control & Irrigation District, known as Lowbidgee, is an area of some 100,000 hectares on the lower Murrumbidgee floodplain, in South Western NSW. This area includes one of the most significant wetlands in Australia, the second largest red gum forest in Australia and a major organic grain production area.

Prior to the completion of Maude and Redbank Weirs in 1940, Lowbidgee flooded naturally. Both weirs were built to compensate for the impact Burren Jack Dam construction had on flooding frequencies. This was the establishment of the Lowbidgee Flood Control & Irrigation District which has operated on "surplus" flows for over 60 years (without a water allocation/entitlement). These weirs allow Lowbidgee to be flooded with minimum flows. The District has enjoyed an average annual diversion of 309 GL over this period.

The changing face of the Murrumbidgee River over the last 100 years has continually impacted on the availability of water to the Lowbidgee wetlands. There are many documented accounts of Lowbidgee landholders wanting to ensure that the wetlands and their livelihoods be protected over this time. With the construction of storage dams and the development of irrigation areas, we now see the Murrumbidgee River as a well-regulated channel.

Why should Governments be concerned about the future of Lowbidgee? It is the most significant wetland on the Murrumbidgee River, in good heart and far from a "basket case". It has a complex network of infrastructure, designed to deliver water to most sectors of the floodplain efficiently. However, if landholders continue to have reduced access to water and the effects of dry seasons remain with us, then as guardians of Lowbidgee we fear for the future of the region and its residents.

Maybe the future of Lowbidgee is in better hands with those that have access to water that is not available to current residents.