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Snowy River in international spotlight

Australia has a leadership role to play in global efforts to effectively manage waterways, according to the head of the world's fastest growing grassroots environmental movement.

Steve Fleischli, President of WATERKEEPER Alliance in the US, is visiting Australia to attend the annual conference of WATERKEEPERS Australia, the only national network of community waterway protectors.

Mr Fleischli said the plan signed five years ago to restore environmental flows to the Snowy River represented an achievement of international significance.

"The global community of Waterkeepers looks to Australia, one of the world's driest continents, to provide leadership on water management policy," Mr Fleischli said.

"With three community based Waterkeepers now established on the Snowy River, from the mountains to the sea, the international Waterkeeper community will be well informed on progress in implementing this historic plan."

One of the key players in the community campaign to restore the Snowy, Upper Snowy RIVERKEEPER, Angel John Gallard and his community are devastated.

"Five years ago the New South Wales, Victorian and federal governments agreed to give life back to the Snowy River by restoring some of its water flows," he said. "They settled on a plan for doing this, and gained much kudos as a result. But now I have grave concerns that the iconic Snowy will be bypassed in the interests of satisfying other agendas, and may compromise the plans viability and integrity."

Mr Gallard added: "I ask that our political leaders make a public commitment to complete this historic plan. Otherwise what hope is there for all the other water plans that have followed?"

When the Mowamba Aqueduct was shut off on August 28 2002, the Snowy River received its first environmental flows. This lifeline allowed the Snowy to start repairing itself and to form a new natural headwater for the river system. Yet, this action was reversed on January 30 2006 and there is still some way to go before the first target of returning 15% of annual natural flows by 2009 is met.

Snowy ESTUARYKEEPER and Director of Waterkeepers Australia, Rob Caune commented, "South East Australia needs the boost that a restored Snowy River will bring. Our traditional regional industries have been in decline for some time and our local economies will grow if the Snowy River gets its fair share."

For interview: Steve Fleischli, President of Waterkeeper Alliance will be available for interview from Nov 8. Please direct queries to Stacey Bloomfield, 0427 194 927

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