**Emerging new models for large-scale private land conservation in Australia: case studies of Gayini Nimmie-Caira and the Great Cumbung Swamp**

**James Fitzsimons**1\*

(co-authors: Rene Woods1, Rich Gilmore1, Deborah Nias2, Natalie Holland1,

Kathryn Ridge2, Jane Hutchinson1, Richard Kingsford3)

1. The Nature Conservancy, Suite 2-01, 60 Leicester Street, Carlton VIC 3053, Australia.
2. Murray Darling Wetlands Working Group, 512 Dean Street, Albury NSW 2640, Australia.
3. Centre for Ecosystem Science, University of New South Wales, Sydney NSW 2052, Australia.

\*Corresponding/presenting author; jfitzsimons@tnc.org; +61 410 567 695

**Abstract**

Private land conservation in Australia varies in approach from non-binding schemes such as NRM-focused landcare and wildlife habitat-focused ‘Land for Wildlife’ programs, through to perpetual binding conservation covenants and land purchased as private reserves by non-government organisations. The recent acquisition of two large properties in the southern Murray-Darling Basin, highlights both different approaches to ownership and governance of large, complex conservation properties and the challenges of restoring nationally-important freshwater ecosystems in the face of climate change.

The Gayini Nimmie-Caira property is approximately 84,000 hectares of freehold land covering nationally-significant open lignum floodplain, River Red Gum and Black Box woodlands as well as grasslands and chenopod shrublands in the lower Murrumbidgee Valley, making it one of the largest single private holdings in the Riverina bioregion. The $180 million Nimmie-Caira water saving project, saw the New South Wales and Australian governments purchase 19 properties on the Nimmie-Caira floodplain, together with associated water rights which helped meet Sustainable Diversion Limits for the Murray-Darling Basin Plan. With the aim of delivering environmental flows and ensuring long-term sustainable land management, the NSW Government invited tenders for the future management of the property. In 2018, a consortium including the Nari Nari Tribal Council, The Nature Conservancy, Murray Darling Wetlands Working Group and University of NSW successfully tendered for the stewardship of Gayini Nimmie-Caira with an integrated economic, social, cultural and ecological vision for Gayini Nimmie-Caira system. Nimmie-Caira represents a different type of private land conservation model, with government playing an important and direct initiating and facilitating role to enable a large-scale private land conservation outcome. Long-term conservation will be ensured through a legally-binding Land and Water Management Plan, easements and an exploration future Ramsar-listing.

In 2019, a joint venture initiative between The Nature Conservancy and Tiverton-Rothwell Agriculture, saw the purchase of Juanbung and Boyong stations spanning 33,765 hectares, and associated water rights, for $55 million. These properties to the north of Gayini Nimmie-Caira, contain the majority of the Great Cumbung Swamp, one of the largest reed swamps in the Murray-Darling Basin and the confluence of the Lachlan and Murrumbidgee rivers. The Great Cumbung will be managed for conservation and sustainable grazing with protective agreements placed on the title over time.