

## Fix compliance don't punish rural communities

The National Irrigators Council (NIC) CEO, Steve Whan, says the review of compliance by the Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) and an independent panel, forms a basis for building an effective and trusted compliance system.

“However,” Steve Whan said, “working through the detail, and implementing the basin plan, will be made much harder if hysterical exaggeration dominates, rather than the painstaking discussion and understanding that is needed to make such a complicated plan work.

“NIC acknowledges that this review, along with the Matthews review in NSW, raises real problems with resourcing and transparency of compliance operations.

“Irrigators pay for compliance in NSW and we expect those millions of dollars to be spent on compliance. The report focuses on using technological solutions but we would emphasise that we need to see people on the ground. Officers who understand the rivers they are managing and know the people they are dealing with.

“Clearly, this report poses challenges for the incoming Queensland Government as well.

“However, we do need to keep this in perspective. Irrigators have zero tolerance for water theft and we support strong action. But this report does not, as the South Australian Premier has claimed, show ‘documented theft’. There are (according to the ABS) 9,200 irrigators in the Murray Darling Basin, this report details five unresolved complaints.

“It shows the overwhelming majority of environmental water goes where it is intended. The vast bulk of that water is in the Southern Basin; Southern NSW, Northern Victoria and South Australia and while the report recommends improvements it does not indicate major problems in those areas.

“The report highlights challenges in unregulated rivers. These rivers are in the Northern Basin but, again, it's not all the rivers. Most Northern Basin catchments are also regulated. Challenges in unregulated rivers are very real and there will need to be a lot of hard work, consultation and respect for legal property rights as a solution is found.

“It does not justify South Australia's attempt to stop the plan by reneging on its agreement to a process that includes the Northern Basin Review and Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment.

“Blocking these measures would cost hundreds of jobs in rural communities, including in the South Australian Riverlands. This report highlights issues at Government level. It doesn't justify attacks on the 99.9% of hard working law-abiding irrigators who grow the food we eat and the fibre we wear. It certainly does not seem at all fair to punish rural communities.”

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