



MEDIA RELEASE

Analysis finds Governments additional water buyback spree is flawed

12 December 2025, Canberra, ACT – The Federal Government's focus on water buybacks in the Murray-Darling Basin fails to comply with Commonwealth Procurement Guidelines to be effective or demonstrate value for money, according to a new report by National Irrigators' Council (NIC).

The NIC report reviewed the Federal Government's purchases and found most have low environmental utility and cannot directly contribute to today's environmental priorities in the Basin – despite costing taxpayers billions.

"These additional water buybacks go beyond what was required to 'bridge the gap' to get Sustainable Diversion Limits in place for the Basin Plan," said NIC CEO Zara Lowien "most of this additional water will not be able to be used as intended and unlikely to contribute to desired environmental outcomes".

"We found that well over 65% of entitlements purchased under the 450 GL program in the Southern Basin are subject to major delivery restrictions of some form, hindering how they can be used and 75% of 'within market price' offers for future purchases are also limited."

"Yet no one seems to be asking, is this the best use of our limited funding? How effective will this additional water be at achieving greater environmental outcomes and do the increasing costs, out way the diminishing benefits from 'just adding more water'" said Ms Lowien.

The report was instigated to address gaps in Government reviews that have focused on the outputs and assessed the processes and purchases against the Government's own Framework and Commonwealth Procurement Rules. Revealing flaws in not only the Government's logic to prioritise more water purchases whilst SDLs are already in-force, without any long-term commitment to ensuring its utility, but also a failure to link outputs (volumes) with outcomes (environmental needs and benefits), even when considering value for money criteria.

"Until the Federal Government can demonstrate value-for-money, and that expenditure is leading to actual environmental outcomes on the ground in the most effective and efficient way, the 450 GL program should not continue," said Ms Lowien.

"Australian taxpayers deserve to know what actual outcomes these billion-dollar programs are trying to achieve, especially when recent reports highlight further budget blowouts".

"Our analysis confirms the immediate need for an independent review of the Federal Governments ongoing water purchases of additional HEW, against the Commonwealth Procurement Rules, and policy objectives, to provide transparency and inform priorities".

"With the Basin Plan Review next year, and the MDBAs own evidence suggesting that environmental investment is required in other areas as a higher priority, it's time Government must stop and look at the science".

"We are calling on the Federal Government to put today's science ahead of past politics and have the courage to move beyond just adding water, in the interests of all in the Basin, and every Australian taxpayer," said Ms Lowien.

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