



MEDIA RELEASE

Basin Plan blowout continues as failed projects open 255-355 GL gap in the Southern MDB

8 December 2025, Canberra, ACT: The amount of water that can be used in the Southern Murray-Darling Basin may need to drop by a further 255 to 355 gigalitres (GL) after 2026, as States remain behind on vital environmental projects, a new report finds. ¹

"Water use has drastically declined since the Basin Plan," said NIC CEO, Zara Lowien "with one in three litres of irrigation water, now out of production and new Sustainable Diversion Limits (SDLs) set by the Basin Plan in force".

"In the Murray Darling Basin, water use for agriculture is not the problem it once was with priorities now shifting to ensuring the vast volumes of water recovered from farmers for the environment, can be delivered to maximise environmental benefits".

"A report by the MDBA, confirms that some vital Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment Mechanism (SDLAM) – supply projects will not be delivered. Meaning the environmental benefits will not be realised and threatening communities with more water recovery".

"These projects are State responsibilities, but the Basin Plan was written to enable the Federal Government to recover more water, if the States did not deliver their projects on time".

"More water is no substitute for these projects," said Ms Lowien "it's a lose-lose, the environment can't get the important projects, and communities and industries will further suffer from less water, unless alternatives are considered," said Ms Lowien.

The report found: *Almost half of the SDLAM measures are unlikely to be completed by 31 December 2026.* This leaves a 255-355 gigalitre shortfall against the 605 GL total offset, but also important environmental projects not in place.

"The issue will be a key topic at this week's MDB Ministerial Council meeting, given the Federal Governments focus on pursuing additional water not required for the SDLs against the wishes of most States, and now this report has all but confirmed there will be another gap to cover and failed environmental projects that underpin Basin Plan effectiveness".

"Further complicating the matter is an independent review finding the Federal Government's plan to recover 450 GL of additional water, would cost taxpayers another \$1.3 billion and the Government's own evidence highlighting that 'just adding water' isn't the solution."

"We have the Federal Government out there buying back *optional* water under a separate program costing an extra \$1.3 billion, while there is no funding pathway forward for important environmental projects that are needed like supply and constraints," said Ms Lowien.

"It's illogical and a change of course is needed urgently," said Ms Lowien "before we waste taxpayers' money and limit opportunities to fund what's really needed".

"Water use is within SDLs but when you look at the science, it's calling for a different approach," said Ms Lowien, "we need to the Federal Government to put today's science ahead of past politics and urge all the Basin States to call this out at the Ministerial meeting."

¹[Annual assurance reports – sustainable diversion limit adjustment mechanism | Murray–Darling Basin Authority Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment Mechanism \(SDLAM\) Reconciliation Framework](#)



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The NIC is calling for a review of WESA policy outcomes (the program designed to enhance environmental outcomes of the Basin Plan, to clearly link how funding and water recovery will actually deliver for the Basin's environment and communities and inform next-years Basin Plan Review.

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