



MEDIA RELEASE

New evidence, old solutions: Basin Communities at risk

2 October 2026, Canberra ACT: Southern Basin communities risk losing a further 265 GL of water according to a new Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) report, unless the Federal Government changes course and puts today's evidence ahead of past politics.¹

"These communities have endured 30 years of reform, already losing 1 in 3 litres of water from farming, who are now hearing they risk a further 265 GL, on top of the 450 GL the Federal Government is already out purchasing," NIC CEO Zara Lowien said.

"It's time to move beyond 'just adding water' to the environment, today's environmental challenges need the right tools, and farmers and communities need stability."

"The Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment Mechanism (SDLAM) reconciliation process risks another 265 GL being removed from farming when the MDBA's own science shows it will not improve environmental indicators," said Ms Lowien.

Work undertaken as part of the Basin Plan Review found 92% of environmental indicators did not improve when comparing current settings with further recovery, even for an assumed larger 300 GL shortfall and the additional 450 GL.²

"If the Government is serious about improving the ecological health of the Basin, decisions should be based on today's evidence, not past politics and rigid policy settings designed a decade ago."

The SDLAM is part of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan and uses State Government water-saving projects to achieve equivalent environmental outcomes, reducing the need for further water recovery. Initially 605GL of offsets was agreed but the MDBA draft report, released today suggests that 340GL is likely, resulting in 265 GL shortfall.

"Governments should wait for the full Basin Plan Review later this year before making evidence-based decisions on the next steps for the current or any future Plan."

"Today's environmental priorities need targeted solutions like tackling invasive species, improving habitat and fish passage, and improving water delivery to floodplains and wetlands. Water recovery is not a substitute for these practical measures.

"We can achieve more by working together and investing in the right tools for the job."

NIC is seeking for the MDBA to publish information on how this shortfall will affect each region to provide communities the information they need to participate in the public consultation.

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¹ [2026 Sustainable diversion limit adjustment mechanism draft determination – reports and supporting documents | Murray-Darling Basin Authority](#)

² [Initial Sustainable Diversion Limit Assessments - Summary of Assessment Approach National Irrigators' Council - Discussion Paper Submission](#)