



National Irrigators' Council
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MEDIA RELEASE

New report reveals just 23% of Murray-Darling Basin water is diverted

National Water Week highlights why better water management matters for rivers, farmers and communities.

21 October 2026, Canberra ACT: A new report by National Irrigators' Council launched for National Water Week, has found that just 23% of the total water available in the Murray-Darling Basin is diverted for human use, while 77% remains non-diverted and in rivers.

The Report comes as the Basin Plan Review progresses, more than a decade since the \$13 billion reform began, aimed at rebalancing water use between the environment and others.

"Water is life – supporting healthy rivers, productive farms and strong communities. This National Water Week, it's important we recognise how much the Basin has changed and what that means for its future," said National Irrigators' Council CEO Zara Lowien.

"After 30 years of reform, more than three-quarters of the Basin's available water now remains non-diverted and in rivers. That just shows how far we've come".

"The Basin has changed, and our approach must change with it. It's time to move beyond just adding more water and focus on getting better outcomes from the water we already have."

The Report is based on the Australian Government Bureau of Meteorology's National Water Account data and assessed actual water use and availability across the Basin.

"With more than three-quarters of the Basin's available water remaining in rivers, the focus must shift from simply recovering more water to addressing the threats that are holding back river health," Ms Lowien said.

"MDBA evidence indicates that 92% of environmental indicators will not improve through additional water recovery alone, highlighting what we know that more water cannot remove invasive species like carp, restore degraded habitats or fix barriers to fish movement. These challenges need targeted solutions, not simply more water recovery."

"This is not about choosing between healthy rivers and productive farms, the standard trade-offs of past policies. It's about investing in the right solutions, for today's challenges."

Ms Lowien said the findings also highlighted the need for clearer and more consistent public reporting of the Basin's overall water balance.

"Too often the discussion focuses on how much entitlement has been recovered, without showing the full picture of how much water is used and how much remains in our rivers.

"If the purpose of the Basin Plan reform was to rebalance water use, then understanding the proportion of water actually being used is fundamental to measuring progress and informing future decisions."

"Water is life, and every drop matters. Our next investments must be guided by [BODs] evidence, delivered together." **Media Contact: Zara Lowien, CEO: 0427 521 399, zara@irrigators.org.au**



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Figure 1:

