



Media Release

Much ado about nothing: irrigators call out Ministers' political smokescreen

12 November 2024, Canberra ACT: Irrigators' have called out Minister Plibersek's announcement¹ of having '1000 willing sellers towards' the Commonwealth's tender to buy water for the Murray-Darling Basin Plan, as a political stunt on the day of Senate Estimates.

"The last time Minister Plibersek announced a buyback tender round had been over-subscribed, the Government later rejected 72% of the offers, contracting only a small proportion of the reported offers (26 GL out of 90 GL), mostly due to value for money concerns," said Zara Lowien, CEO of the National Irrigators' Council.

"Past experience shows us that people putting their hand up to sell their water to the Government, is really no indication on actual progress. You can have 1000 willing sellers but that doesn't matter if the buyer cannot proceed due to procurement guidelines."

"Making this announcement of '1000 willing sellers' a continuation of a political smokescreen as the Albanese Government continues to embellish their efforts on implementing the Murray Darling Basin Plan without any contracts or evidence".

A search of Federal financial funding agreements² indicated that one project for the Resilient River Program has been contracted (which was progressed prior to last year's Basin Plan amendments) and the Reconnecting River Country constraints project.

Ms Lowien, highlighting that "the governments messaging isn't being backed by any action that we can see."

"Nearly 12-months since the Restoring Our Rivers Bill became law, we have no real evidence that Governments have made genuine progress towards implementing the Basin Plan, other than inflated media announcements, which we know, not all will turn into contracts".

"There are no new projects contracted under the Resilient Rivers Program nor contracts for the Basin Communities Fund, and both programs are key pillars of the Department's 'framework' to enact the Minister's promise to parliament that purchases wouldn't be the first and only tool in the toolbox and that communities would not be left behind."

"We call on the Minister to stop putting up political smokescreens and provide real transparency on the governments progress on the Murray Darling Basin Plan".

"Last year's amendments were also meant to provide greater accountability and transparency with annual reporting to parliament, which we are yet to see."

"We've been warning governments not to waste the timeline extension," said Ms Lowien, "everyone in the Basin deserves better than misleading statements, we need regular, honest and accurate indication on how all of the Government's Basin Plan programs are tracking."

ENDS

Media Contact: Zara Lowien, CEO National Irrigators' Council

ceo@irrigators.org.au,

0427521399

¹ [More than 1,000 willing sellers respond to Basin tender towards 450 | Ministers](#)

² <https://federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/>