



MEDIA RELEASE

Review finds it's time to move beyond 'just adding water' for the Basin

5 February 2026, Canberra, ACT: A first look at the Murray Darling Basin Authority's Basin Plan Review discussion paper, reveals again that more is needed than 'just adding water' to improve the environments of the Basin.

"The discussion paper should serve as an important wake up call to the Federal Government who continue to use old tools, for today's challenges", said NIC CEO, Zara Lowien.

"The paper found that most Sustainable Diversion Limits are meeting environmental outcomes and further investigation would be needed in some areas to consider the complexity of environmental drivers other than water flows – again signalling the need for a new approach, beyond 'just adding water' for the Basin," said Ms Lowien.

"It has become increasingly clear throughout Basin Plan implementation that solutions to improve our rivers whilst maintaining viable irrigation-water dependent communities, are more complex than assumed, over a decade ago."

"Any calls for more water from farmers now, ignores the lessons of the past 14-years of implementation, and the growing evidence of what the Basin now needs," said Ms Lowien.

The MDBA paper says: *'our initial assessment is that more targeted solutions to address the broader set of drivers are needed to achieve environmental outcomes'*.¹

"The current Basin Plan focused on reducing water usage by establishing new sustainable water limits – that's been done, with 1 in 3 litres of irrigation water now out of production and sustainable limits in place – the next Basin Plan will need a different focus for today's issues."

"Further work to better understand drivers of environmental outcomes is about getting the right solutions, not just continuing with the past tools," said Ms Lowien.

"We welcome further data and discussion to move forward on management options in the Basin, beyond the simple concept of 'just adding more water' during consultation."

"We are ready for further discussions that focus on how to optimise the delivery of existing environmental water, what priority investments are needed to complement environmental water, as well as, seeking commitments to community supported constraints, rather than the current approach of adding more water," said Ms Lowien.

"Government owes it to both the environment, and communities, to get this right."

NIC will undertake detailed analysis and provide further comments in due course.

ENDS | Media Contact: Zara Lowien, CEO | 0427 521 399 | ceo@irrigators.org.au

¹ (Box 2.4). page 15