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MEDIA RELEASE

SunRice cuts show water recovery has gone beyond the tipping point

13 July 2026, Canberra ACT – Communities in the Murray-Darling Basin are calling on the Federal Government to stop, after SunRice attributed major changes to Australian milling sites directly to slashed water for farming under the Basin Plan, putting hundreds of jobs at risk.

"The industry has been warning the Federal Government of this exact risk for years, and now the worst-case scenario is unfolding," said Zara Lowien, CEO of the National Irrigators' Council (NIC).

"We have seen 1 in 3 litres of water be removed from agriculture, and this has real consequences."

The news comes as the Federal Government continues relentless water buybacks to meet additional targets under the Basin Plan, despite Sustainable Diversion Limits taking effect in 2019, and usage tracking well below those limits.

"The Basin Plan was meant to restore balance between environmental and human needs, but questions must now be asked if they've gone too far, going beyond tipping points for key industries" said Ms Lowien.

"Only 28% of total water in the Basin is now available for use, leaving the rest for the environment - even the Government's own science shows the balance has been struck."

To make matters worse, Southern Basin communities are set to lose a further ~355 GL of water next year if the Federal Government doesn't change course, after key offset projects have not been delivered.

"The Basin Plan originally required additional water buybacks to only be permitted if they came at no social or economic cost, but this requirement was watered down in 2023 to only need *consideration*."

"The Basin Plan has been plagued by very poor social and economic considerations, and this is the result – it's not just numbers on a spreadsheet – but real impacts on industries, communities, jobs and people."

"It doesn't have to be this way, there are options on the table that would serve a better environmental benefit, without these impacts," said Ms Lowien, "the way forward is there, we just need the Federal Government to put the Basin and its communities ahead of politics."

We acknowledge commitments by SunRice to support workers as best they can in what is an incredibly difficult political environment for Australian agriculture.

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