

Wednesday, 29th August 2012

Déjà Vu as crocodiles in the Detail start to bite

News that the MDBA wants to change the Benchmark modelling it has used to calculate the amount of water it will recover from Basin communities is creating concern throughout the Basin, the CEO of the National Irrigators' Council, Tom Chesson said today.

“Changing the Benchmark modelling after the Basin Plan has been approved by the Parliament would be akin to Olympic Officials forgetting to tell Usain Bolt they had suddenly decided to make the 100 metre Olympic final a 150 metre event,” Mr Chesson said.

“We were extremely concerned to read in the joint [New South Wales/Victorian Ministerial Statement](#) (Attachment B) that the MDBA is proposing to change the assumptions used in the Benchmark modelling run.

“Whilst we do not have an issue with the fact that the Benchmark modelling run is flawed contains errors and needs to be improved, we are concerned that the MDBA believes that it can just go ahead and change the Benchmark Modelling run at will.

“The whole idea of a Benchmark model run is to have a benchmark that you can measure future actions against.

“The Benchmark model run becomes irrelevant if it can be changed without reference to State Governments and other interested parties.

“We agree with NSW and Victoria that it is necessary to have agreed policy and principles and governance around any process to change the benchmark model and then oversee its use in the adjustment process.

“This latest trick smells like the stunt the Commonwealth Water Department pulled in November last year when without telling anyone they changed the way they work out the reliability of the water they had purchased.

“The practical effect of this was that at the stroke of a pen the water already recovered by the Government has been significantly reduced in some valleys.”

In one example on August 31, 2011, 19,000 megalitres of water bought by the taxpayers for nearly \$20 million, the expected annual average volume of water available for the environment was 3,629 megalitres, while under the new system it was expected to be 172 megalitres.

“Communities in valleys such as the Murrumbidgee, Murray (NSW, Victoria and SA), Lachlan, and the Goulburn-Broken would have had to have been stripped of more water to make up the difference,” Mr Chesson said.

“We were pleased that the Government quickly realised that this type of behaviour was not on and reversed that sneaky decision.

Mr Chesson said it was astounding that such a fundamental issue as the Benchmark modelling was still being changed this late in a drawn out process.

“We need to have faith in the process and changing something as fundamental as the Benchmark Modelling which underpins the entire Basin Plan without reference to the States and interested parties is simply breathtaking,” Mr Chesson said.

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