

Wentworth Group Unduly Pessimistic

CEO of the National Irrigators' Council (NIC), Steve Whan, says the Wentworth Group's report on progress of the Basin Plan is unduly pessimistic.

Steve Whan said "the Wentworth Group raises some reasonable points in their brief report, but at the same time a number of their conclusions are hard to justify.

"It is difficult to understand why a group focused on environmental outcomes continues to discount the importance of doing more than 'just adding water'. How can we improve the ability of native fish to breed when they are crowded out by carp or when water is too cold for them to breed?

"Irrigators' want to see a healthy river, along with healthy regional communities and an agriculture sector that is able to produce the food and fibre Australians need for domestic consumption and export.

"Communities have been hurt by water buybacks and it is good to see the Wentworth Group acknowledge that and recommend more adjustment assistance.

"The negative impact on communities of non-strategic buybacks is proven. Irrigators believe the plan's objectives can be achieved without them.

"There are still years to go on implementation of many of the basin plan measures. The Wentworth group's comment on lack of progress on the 450GL up-water is hard to justify given it is still well within the legislated timeframes – and given the importance of ensuring the promise of no negative community impact is met.

"It is also hard to see justification for criticism of projects proposed by the States for the SDL adjustment. Again, these have just been formally proposed and they won't be fully implemented until 2024.

"NIC's members live in the Murray Darling basin and they confirm, with their anecdotal evidence, what we are hearing from the Commonwealth, that they are seeing improvements in the environment.

"But, we need to all acknowledge that environmental recovery will take decades and making a judgement half way through Plan implementation is premature.

"NIC represents people who use water to produce food, fibre, jobs and better living standards for all Australians. We will continue to advocate for them and for their communities, along with a healthy river environment. I acknowledge that there will always be other views and welcome the Wentworth Group's continuing role."

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