

## Wentworth Group Headline Seeking Unhelpful

National Irrigators Council CEO Steve Whan says headline seeking comments from the Wentworth group are unhelpful to the task of achieving the basin plan, and dealing with the very difficult issue of removing constraints.

Steve Whan said “the Wentworth Group has a legitimate role in advocating the environmental health of the Murray Darling Basin, but they are diminishing their ‘independence’ by being sensationalist, instead of constructive.

“We are part way through a very difficult process in implementing the Murray Darling Basin plan. It has cost a lot of jobs and has been very hard for many irrigation communities. Yet irrigators are committed to making it work, because we know that the health of the river is vital to everyone who relies on it and lives in the basin.

“It is clear from the on the ground reports, the reports from the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder and other environmental agencies, that there have been some positive early results. But we are only half way through and some things, including constraints removal, have been harder to resolve than others.

“Constraints are physical barriers that prevent enough water being put down a river to achieve the desired environmental flow. In some cases, overcoming constraints means subjecting some areas to man made flooding. That’s not necessarily a bad thing, but it does need careful planning and it really does need a lot more consultation and engagement than, perhaps, the drafters of the plan envisaged.

“It’s all very well for someone looking in from the outside to say it should be instantly fixed, but we should recognise that the people who are actually affected are entitled to full consultation and careful planning.

“NIC understands that some very good work has been undertaken with accurate mapping of flooding and overbank events. That is critical ground work to understanding where the funds should be spent.

“Dealing with constraints is frustratingly slow, but barrelling in with headline seeking comments is unlikely to make the people involved more likely to agree.

“As for that big private company apparently alleged by the media to be charging too much to use its infrastructure. That company is, in fact, 100% customer owned, it has lost a substantial portion of its revenue as a result of the basin plan and it is entirely responsible for it to seek appropriate payment for the use of its infrastructure.”

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