

Basin setback from Ministerial meeting

National Irrigators Council CEO, Steve Whan, says today's ministerial council meeting is a serious setback for a cooperative Murray Darling Basin plan.

Steve Whan said "we called on Ministers to keep the plan on track by indicating unanimous support for the steps to which all Governments agreed in 2012. That meant providing support for the Northern Basin amendment currently before the Parliament and the 605GL Sustainable Diversion Limit (SDL) adjustment measures.

"Unfortunately that has not happened, with Ministers leaving this morning's meeting peppering their media comments with accusations rather than solutions.

"We could be forgiven for thinking that South Australian Minister Hunter has one firm eye on an election in March, to the point where he is willing to play a game of brinkmanship with the future of the Murray Darling Basin Plan and for the communities and the agriculture industries that depend on certainty for their future planning, investment and jobs.

"It was an unacceptable outcome from Ministers in Albury. NIC strongly urges all Basin Governments to urgently come back to the table and engage with each other and work through their differences.

"We are coming up to two critical decisions in Federal Parliament.

"Under the law, as it stands we only get one chance at the 605GL SDL adjustment measures; if they are disallowed, the plan obliges Government to recover socially and economically devastating quantities of water from communities in NSW, Vic and SA.

"It should also be clear that if this measure falls over there will be severe negative environmental impacts. The SDL measures include constraints – and if those projects don't get up, South Australia physically cannot get its environmental water.

"The SDL measures are so critical that there is a real possibility that if they are disallowed, the Plan implementation could cease.

"It's an unacceptable outcome and Ministers must get back to being constructive."

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