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The Fish Don't Care Who Funds Them

The National Irrigators' Council (NIC) said the future of the Nations' food bowl was resting on the implementation of Murray Darling Basin Plan and unless it was properly resourced it could become a complete shambles.

"Today Senior Murray Darling Basin Officials are meeting in Canberra to discuss the future of the Murray Darling Basin Authority, including how it is to be funded," NIC CEO, Tom Chesson said.

"We have previously said the decision to cut funding for the Native Fish Strategy was just another odd decision in a long line of questionable calls."

"Irrigators have said time and time again that just adding water is not a solution to a complex web of environmental problems in the Basin. Complementary Natural Resource Management action is critical for to achieve a healthy working river system."

"Even the MDBA Chair has acknowledged that unless environmental watering is integrated into broader natural resource management, the benefits of reforming water use would be '*... undermined by environmental degradation stemming from a lack of investment in natural resource management.*'"

Mr Chesson said over \$12 billion has been allocated to recover water under the Basin, yet the Regulatory Impact Statement highlights the Commonwealth Government is proposing to spend less than 1 per cent of that per annum implementing and delivering the Basin Plan.

"For example just metering and monitoring the use of environmental water to ensure that the billions of dollars of taxpayers' funds invested in the Basin Plan are not being wasted will cost millions of dollars per annum."

"Yet the Government is cutting funding to the Sustainable Rivers Audit process which was to be the benchmark by which taxpayers could judge whether their massive \$12 billion investment was working."

Mr Chesson said irrigators understand taxpayers' dollars are scarce and where possible existing resources should be used.

"The NIC believes that, whilst there are certainly budget savings to be had in the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities and the MDBA, cutting the Native Fish Strategy is a short sighted move which will harm the environmental health of the Murray Darling Basin," he said.

Mr Chesson said we are urging the Government to make up the funding shortfall and increase funding for on the ground works from either the billion dollar Clean Energy Biodiversity Fund or the two billion dollar Caring for Country program.

"At the end of the day the fish don't care where the funding comes from."

"We do not want to be in a situation where Governments are announcing another 'historic' reform of the MDB in a few years' time because the implementation of this 'historic' Basin Plan was ill-thought out and under-resourced," Mr Chesson concluded.

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