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Irrigators welcome Senate review of Water Act

The National Irrigators' Council has welcomed the decision of the Senate to instigate an inquiry into the *Water Act 2007* and its capacity to deliver a Murray Darling Basin Plan that balances environmental, economic and social factors.

The NIC has long voiced its concerns about the Water Act and the inquiry by the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs committee will provide an opportunity for the Parliament to fully investigate any shortcomings in the legislation.

"We've long argued that the Act is flawed in that it favours the environment over people, communities and food and fibre production," said NIC CEO Danny O'Brien.

"We welcome Senator Barnaby Joyce's efforts to have the Act properly reviewed. He should be commended for being prepared to accept there might be a problem.

"We're pleased the Government is committed to a triple bottom line outcome but no-one, including the Government, should be afraid of having a proper review of the Act that underpins the whole Basin Plan process. This Act has been passed twice by both sides of Parliament, so there needn't be any political blame game - let's just make sure we've got it right.

"The worst outcome for all of us with an interest in the Basin's future would be the delivery of a Basin Plan that we can all live with that is ultimately torpedoed in the courts.

"Getting the Act right now should help avoid that problem."

Mr O'Brien said the Act is unbalanced because to achieve a head of power under the Constitution, the Act relies on the Commonwealth's external affairs powers and its obligations under international treaties.

"Those treaties, such as the Ramsar convention on wetlands, are overwhelmingly focussed on the environment and that means people, communities and food and fibre production play second fiddle under the Act.

"If we are to have a triple bottom line outcome, then each of those factors – environment, economic and social – need to be treated equally."

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