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Report highlights the need for balance

A social and economic impact study released today by the Murray Darling Basin Authority highlights the significant damage that will be wrought on local communities and Australia's food and fibre production base by an unbalanced Basin Plan.

The National Irrigators' Council said the report clearly indicated that a Plan that favours the environment without regard for social and economic impacts will cost jobs and threaten family farms and communities in regional Australia.

NIC CEO Danny O'Brien welcomed the report's findings, including on options for improving water buybacks and infrastructure programs so as to minimise the social and economic impacts.

"This report confirms what irrigators and their communities have been saying for a long time – that the removal of significant volumes of water entitlement will have a dramatic impact on irrigation-dependent communities.

"Places like Cobram, Deniliquin, Griffith, Moree and St George would be among the most affected, while even bigger cities such as Shepparton could also suffer.

"Most importantly these impacts are not just felt by irrigators – they are felt by local truckies, factory workers, accountants, bakers and service station owners.

"Irrigators support sensible reform that returns water to the environment, but today's report highlights that it must be balanced with social and economic considerations as well."

Mr O'Brien said the report also highlighted the need for more focus on infrastructure investment and a smarter approach to the buyback to deliver the same environmental outcomes with significantly less impact on communities.

"So far the Commonwealth has been tardy on both of these issues. In response to this report and the recommendations of the bi-partisan Windsor inquiry, the Commonwealth must get its act together. The ball is now squarely in Tony Burke's court to get the infrastructure funds rolling and to deliver a more structured, targeted approach to buyback that leaves a legacy of efficient, sustainable irrigation systems."

The report will be a topic of conversation when Water Minister Tony Burke and MDBA Chairman Craig Knowles speak at a meeting of the NIC in Canberra next Tuesday.

Delegates will also welcome the NIC's latest new members, Namoi Water and Wine Grape Growers Australia.

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