

Friday 22nd June, 2012

A healthy working river is about more than 'just adding water'

The National Irrigators' Council will today tell the Regional Australia Parliamentary Inquiry that investing in environmental works and measures, infrastructure and efficiencies, in turn reducing the need for 'held' environmental water entitlement could break the current deadlock and see a Basin Plan delivered by the end of the year.

The CEO of the National Irrigators' Council (NIC), Tom Chesson said the NIC submission provided a number of sensible initiatives which if adopted would help ensure irrigation communities had a future, jobs weren't lost, food prices didn't sky rocket and environmental outcomes were actually achieved.

Mr Chesson said hundreds of gigalitres in environmental works and measures had been identified in the submissions sent to the Committee and said the NIC Submission had highlighted just a handful of them which could deliver hundreds of thousands of megalitres.

"For example during the last drought Victoria built a pipeline from the MDB and the environment received 75 GL/y in entitlements and Melbourne Urban water users received 75GL/y. The Victorian Government has said that it will not be operating the pipeline unless Melbourne's own water supplies drop below 30%. Melbourne's 75GL/y could be leased back to the environment when it isn't needed. It is a similar story in Canberra, Adelaide and towns and cities across the Basin.

"The NIC submission is also calling on the Government to begin planning now for the replacement of the existing Barrages between Lake Alexandrina and the Coorong.

"Irrespective of whether the Government decides to back environmental works and measures as a way of offsetting the amount of water needing to be recovered, it will still have to invest in infrastructure to deliver the water it already holds onto environmental assets.

"Despite having the perfect conditions to deliver additional water 'naturally' to wetlands via flooding events, the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder (CEWH), has failed to deliver over fifty percent of the water it had been allocated last year.

"This begs the question; if the CEWH can only deliver fifty percent or 662 GL of the 1300 GL it had allocated to it, how is it going to deliver the 2750 GL/y the Government claims it needs to recover?"

Mr Chesson said the Victorian Government's submission highlighted the ongoing failure of the MDBA to explain how it was going to deliver water to environmental assets when it stated;

'Overall, it is disappointing that the MDBA appears to have given limited consideration to the practical planning elements required to deliver environmental water in an efficient and coordinated way, instead deferring to the notion of 'localism' to explain this omission. As a result, proposals under the EWP (Environmental Watering Plan) are likely to be unworkable in practice ...'

"Basin communities have roundly rejected the proposed Basin Plan and the headline recovery figure of 2750 GL/y (LTAAY). The only way forward is for the Government to work on ways of delivering environmental outcomes needed through efficiencies, environmental works and measures and infrastructure all of which would result in a more balanced plan," Mr Chesson said.

Contact: Tom Chesson 0418 415597: Today's program is [here](#) and can be followed live [here](#).