

Tuesday, 25 May 2010

ACF misleading on Murray-Darling water diversions

The Australian Conservation Foundation is misleading Australians with its current “Just Add Water” campaign on the Murray Darling Basin with the use of incorrect and unsourced “facts”.

The National Irrigators’ Council said the ACF’s website and an advertisement placed in *The Age* last week claimed that “more than 75 per cent of the Murray’s water is sucked out for irrigation every year”.

“This statement is simply false,” NIC CEO Danny O’Brien said.

“The CSIRO Sustainable Yields audit which has been lauded by politicians and environmentalists alike as the foundation upon which we should be basing future management of the Basin tells a very different story.

“CSIRO puts the relative level of surface water use – that is the ratio of water used to that which is available – at 48 per cent for the whole Murray Darling Basin¹. For the Murray itself, the figure is 36 per cent². And of course while irrigation for food and fibre uses most of that, diverted water also goes to our cities and towns, including Adelaide.

“To pluck a figure such as 75 per cent out of the air (and not source it) is disappointing and does no credit to the ACF, which usually takes a much more responsible approach. This kind of campaigning completely distorts what is a complex debate at the best of times.”

Mr O’Brien said irrigators support the need for a healthy ecosystem, but it must be balanced by the needs of irrigators, their communities and food and fibre production for all Australians.

“The ACF says in its campaign that we must ‘get the balance right’. We couldn’t agree more but using incorrect information as a starting point is not going to help achieve that aim.

“We note the ACF also makes a number of other unsourced claims in its campaign. If we are going to have a rational debate based on science then we expect better from an organisation such as the ACF.”

Mr O’Brien said irrigators were playing an active role in the reform process but it must be remembered that most of the problems facing the Murray-Darling Basin at present relate to the worst drought in over 100 years.

“We know the environment has suffered in recent years, but so have irrigators and the only short-term solution for both is good rain in the catchments.”

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¹ CSIRO (2008) – Water Availability in the Murray-Darling Basin – A report to the Australian Government from the CSIRO Murray-Darling Basin Sustainable Yields Project, pg 28

² CSIRO (2008) - Murray region fact sheet: Murray-Darling Basin Sustainable Yields Project