

Monday, 23 May 2011

Regional Australia Committee gets it – Wentworth Group doesn't

The National Irrigators' Council said today it was right for Tony Windsor's Regional Australia committee to delay its final report on the Murray-Darling basin Plan to ensure it finds the right balance, a fact that seems to have eluded the Wentworth Group.

"We expect that the best available science – environmental, economic and social – will be used as an input to the draft Basin Plan, but as we saw from the Guide last year, the best available science is indeed not very good," said NIC CEO Danny O'Brien.

"That just highlights the need for judgement calls to be made by elected politicians when considering the trade-offs required to deliver a balanced Basin Plan.

"Tony Windsor and his Regional Australia Committee members clearly understand that, announcing this morning that they will take more time to ensure that their report is well balanced. We particularly welcome the comment of Mr Windsor that while people in the Basin want certainty, the committee wants to ensure it gets its final report right.

"We all want certainty, but we don't want certain death."

Mr O'Brien said it was apparent that some interest groups had failed to learn the lesson that science could not and should not be the only arbiter of a decision on the Murray Darling Basin Plan.

"We're not sure what it is that the Wentworth Group is upset about but throwing a tantrum and walking away from a process before it's even concluded only reflects poorly on them. Frankly, we don't think anyone will miss them.

"Running to a political lobby group such as Get Up to start a meaningless email campaign isn't going to help us get an outcome we can all live with. 20,000 people 'got-up' and attended meetings throughout the Basin last year in response to the Guide and their message was pretty clear."

Mr O'Brien said NIC expected that the science in the Basin Plan would be peer-reviewed and had received a commitment from MDBA Chair Craig Knowles that this would be the case.

"A good Basin Plan must have input from peer-reviewed science, but the MDBA freely admitted that what it has so far comes with only a 'medium' level of confidence at best. That means judgement calls must be made.

"At the same time, reports the MDBA is now looking at 2800 GL would be concerning to irrigators. Just because you put a price sticker on something at \$9.95 doesn't hide the fact that the customer is really paying \$10."

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