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An Historic Draft Basin Plan or the Start of the Great Basin Scam

The National Irrigators' Council (NIC) today said the draft Basin Plan in its current form is unacceptable.

Chairman of the NIC, Stewart Ellis, said the draft basin plan will cost thousands of jobs, put pressure on food prices, and threaten family farms and regional communities.

"If the draft Basin Plan is adopted in its current form the Minister would be responsible for:

- Economically and socially destroying communities reliant on water for their survival;
- Failing to deliver on a promise of a balanced plan which takes into consideration equally social, environmental and economic outcomes;
- Offering no solutions to problems of invasive fish species, riparian vegetation, urban pollution, cold-water pollution etc;
- Ignoring the people who live in the Basin, and making a mockery of the idea of 'localism';
- Causing flooding events which will have the potential to damage infrastructure."

Mr Ellis said irrigators want a healthy river system – we rely on it – but we want a balanced plan that considers the needs of people, communities and food and fibre production as well as the environment.

"The Australian Food and Grocery Council warned the Government that food manufacturing in the Murray Darling Basin has already reached tipping point with over 130,000 jobs at threat of disappearing in the sector in the next nine years.

"It is extremely disappointing that there is no environmental watering plan in the draft plan, which begs the question of how the Government can up with any number when it doesn't know and won't know for at least another three years how, when, where, why or what it wants to water?

"The draft Basin Plan fails to acknowledge that over 2.1 million megalitres of water entitlements have been recovered from irrigators in the past seven years, and by 2019 well over four million megalitres of water entitlement will have been taken out of our communities.

"We acknowledge the Government's commitment to review the Plan in 2015, as a good starting point, however there is no legal requirement for the Government to act on any findings of the 2015 review," he said.

Mr Ellis said Australia has the world's most efficient irrigators and we stand ready to help and ensure the country's newest and biggest irrigator, the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder does not end up destroying our communities and our the basins' iconic environmental sites.

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