

Draft Basin Plan in Danger of Being 'Half Pregnant'

Irrigation communities in the Murray Darling Basin (MDB) are worried the Governments' Basin Plan will be an expensive failure if the focus is solely on removing water from communities.

The CEO of the National Irrigators' Council, Mr Tom Chesson, said if the Basin Plan to have any chance of being supported by communities it has to focus on environmental outcomes not just gigalitres.

"The Sustainable Rivers Audit (used by Governments to rate the health of 23 River Valleys in the MBD) shows the hydrology of eighteen of the twenty-three Valleys is rated as moderate to good, or good.

"The Audit says it confirms the 'well-known decline of native fish in the Basin', and states; 'common carp were overwhelmingly dominant, being 58% of total fish biomass' across the 23 valleys, as a result, fish health in 20 of the valleys rates extremely poor – poor.

"Alarming, a media release issued by the Government's own expert body on feral pests, the Invasive Animals Co-operative Research Centre, is warning the 'carp are coming' with numbers in the Lower Darling already exploding by 4000 percent.

"Following the floods it is a similar story in other valleys."

Mr Chesson said when the 'rats of the river' are on the rampage, it means tough times for our native fish, yabbies and shrimp.

"Unless the Government broadens its efforts beyond removing the amount of water communities are allowed to use, carp will continue to decimate our native fish, yabbies and other macroinvertebrates.

"The Government's own expert, Dr Andrea Glanznig, CEO of the Invasive Animals CRC has clearly warned the Government it's current plans spell bad news for our native fish when he stated;

'Perversely, delivering environmental flows to iconic wetlands on the Murray floodplain can also enhance carp spawning and recruitment'."

Mr Chesson said it wasn't just carp that are threatening the health of the Basin's rivers.

"According to the NSW Government, following the floods there were major blackwater fish kills especially Murray Cod along the Murray River (particularly large wetland areas such as the Barmah-Millewa and Koondrook-Pericoota Forests), Edward and Wakool river systems, Lower Darling and Murrumbidgee Rivers.

"High-profile fishing activist and commentator, Rod MacKenzie, has said the massive fish kill was even more heartbreaking because Murray cod had been an environmental success story, increasing in numbers and size every year'.

Mr Chesson said it is hoped the Basin Plan doesn't end up being an expensive one trick pony.

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