

Tuesday 27th November, 2012

Time to Make a Bad Plan Better

The National Irrigators' Council said the river doesn't care how water is recovered and capping water buy-backs in legislation will go a long way to delivering a better basin plan.

NIC CEO, Tom Chesson today welcomed the fact that some Members of Parliament are prepared to put their communities first.

Mr Chesson said the Leader of the Opposition, Tony Abbott had told a crowd of 15,000 people in Griffith that the Coalition would not support a 'bad' Basin Plan.

"Some Members of both the Liberal Party and the National Party believe that the Basin Plan is bad for the environment, bad for the economy and bad for their local communities.

"The Opposition now has the opportunity to make a bad Basin Plan better by promising a Coalition Government would legislate to cap water buy-backs at 1500 GL and to guarantee that water recovered for the environment will be done in a way that is socially and economically neutral," he said.

Mr Chesson said he had no doubt the Government will be tempted to exploit the geographical split in the Coalition.

"However, they should remember that Coalition Members who are supporting the disallowance represent communities which are genuinely concerned about their futures and the environmental impact of the Basin Plan.

"The failure of the Government to actively communicate with communities which are doing and have done all the heavy lifting to implement the Basin Plan is causing enormous angst in these communities.

"For example the Prime Minister has visited Adelaide to discuss the Murray Darling Basin Plan but has not visited communities in the Basin in other States to hear from them directly about their concerns.

"The Governments' default position if the 650 GL/y of environmental works and measures do not materialise is that communities bear the brunt of water-buy backs to make up any shortfall.

"Similarly the Water Amendment Bill before the Parliament specifically allows further water buy-backs despite the Government saying the extra 450 GL of water would be recovered through infrastructure.

"Both the Prime Minister and her Water Minister have made it very clear that there are social and economic 'downsides' to communities with water buy-backs," he said.

"If the Government is confident that the processes they have implemented to recover water will work as stated, then they should not have any problems legislating to ensure there is a cap on buy-backs," he said.

Mr Chesson said both the Government and the Coalition now have the opportunity to make a bad Basin Plan better.

Media Contact: Tom Chesson 0418 415597