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Basin Plan won't help with food trade deficit

The revelation today that Australia now has a trade deficit in food and grocery manufacturing should be a warning sign to the Federal Government that it cannot afford to needlessly slash food production in the Murray Darling Basin.

The National Irrigators' Council said the release of the Australian Food and Grocery Council's "State of the Industry Report 2010" should be essential reading for all involved in the Murray Darling Basin debate.

"The report reveals that we now have a trade deficit in food and grocery manufacturing – that is we are a net importer," said NIC CEO Danny O'Brien.

"It also highlights the sector's concerns that proposed cuts to water availability under the Basin Plan would further threaten the viability of food manufacturers in the basin.

"This is further evidence that an unbalanced Basin Plan – such as that currently proposed by the MDBA's will cost jobs and threaten our food production. It would almost certainly hurt all Australians by putting pressure on food prices and it would force families off farms.

"We all need a healthy river – irrigators rely on it more than most – but the Basin Plan must also balance the needs of our food production sector and the regional communities that are the food bowl of this nation."

Mr O'Brien said arguments over legal advice would continue but the fact is we must have a triple bottom line approach to this.

"If we don't get the balance right, our food production base will be hurt, food prices will rise and many thousands of people will lose their jobs.

"The MDBA must go back to the drawing board on the Basin Plan and put some balance into the equation while governments must be prepared to invest in environmental works and measures to improve efficiency and reduce the impact on communities."

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