

Tuesday, 19 October 2010

MDBA confirms it again – people don't count under the *Water Act*

The Murray Darling Basin Authority has confirmed again today that it has no power to give equal consideration to the needs of the environment, food production and regional communities when setting new sustainable diversion limits.

The National Irrigators' Council said no further evidence was needed now that the Water Act is ill-equipped to deliver a triple bottom line outcome which maximises economic, social and environmental results.

This morning in Senate Estimates hearings, MDBA Chief Executive Rob Freeman said:

"The Authority set a lower limit at 3000, beyond that we don't believe we deliver the environmental objectives of the Act."

When asked what would happen if no significant engineering improvements were identified and if a new socio-economic study found the cuts of 3000 gigalitres would be damaging, Mr Freeman said:

"That would ultimately force the authority to choose the 3000 (gigalitre cut to water allocations)."

NIC CEO Danny O'Brien said it couldn't be clearer.

"Under the Water Act as it stands, people don't count. Effectively it says: find out what the environment needs and deliver it, then count the damage.

"We can have all the impact statements in the world, but unless the politicians are prepared to step in, then we will not get a Basin Plan that balances the needs of the environment with those of food production and regional communities.

"Minister Burke must either be prepared to use his powers under the Act to direct the MDBA to insert some balance, or he and his colleagues need to take another look at the Act.

"Surely no-one is suggesting we should have a completely one-sided outcome that doesn't consider jobs, food and fibre production and regional communities?"

"If you just want to deliver a perfect environment then by all means follow the Act, but if you want a triple bottom line outcome, which will necessitate trade-offs for all, you need to step in and make some changes.

"We will accept a balanced Basin Plan, but not one that does not genuinely consider the interests of our communities."

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