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Consultation without information killing the process

The Murray Darling Basin Authority must immediately release the scientific and economic modelling behind its "Guide to the Proposed Murray Darling Basin Plan" if it is truly committed to genuine consultation with basin communities.

The National Irrigators' Council said Water Minister Tony Burke needed to understand it is impossible for the community to engage in the process without clear access to the so-called science behind those decisions.

NIC CEO Danny O'Brien said the Authority had apparently released 1000 documents supporting its proposals, but there is not a single reference in the guide linking decisions to those documents.

"Cuts of this magnitude will hurt all Australians – it will cost jobs, force up food prices and threaten farms that have been in families for generations. The Minister and the government need to understand that.

"The 1500 people at this morning's meeting at Deniliquin – including those locked out – are worried about their jobs, their businesses, their farms and their futures," Mr O'Brien said.

"If they are to lose a third of the economic base of their communities, they want to know if the decisions are based on reliable science. Without that information we are having a shadow discussion where the people are in the dark.

"So far what we are hearing at the public sessions is that the information used to make these decisions is very rubbery – as evidenced by the laughable claim that cutting a third of the water availability will only cost 800 jobs. If the MDBA can't get those numbers right, what confidence can we have that the environmental science is right?"

Mr O'Brien said it is not good enough that this information and the 19 individual valley guides have not been released.

"The MDBA promised us 21 volumes in this guide – they've released one. That's not a good start for a genuine engagement with communities. Treating us like mushrooms is part of the reason for the growing anger building right throughout the Murray Darling Basin."

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