

Sunday, 10 October 2010

10 missing pieces the MDBA must address

The National Irrigators' Council has outlined the first 10 issues it believes the Murray Darling Basin Authority must urgently address with its *Guide to the Proposed Basin Plan*.

NIC CEO Danny O'Brien said while proposed cuts to water for productive use clearly failed to deliver balance between the needs of the environment and those of food producers and regional communities, the MDBA had made several other omissions, errors or misstatements in the Guide.

"If accepted, this Plan will cost thousands of jobs, force up food prices and threaten family farms. We would accept Minister Burke's assurance that this is just the start of the consultation process if useful information had been provided up front.

"The most obvious problem with the guide is the lack of detail and supporting evidence. Fair dinkum, if a high school kid put this document up for a school report, they'd get a D minus," Mr O'Brien said.

"After 18 months and at least three delays, we are totally perplexed as to why this paper looks like something written the night before school. We're sure the MDBA has done the background work – so where is it?"

Mr O'Brien said the first 10 issues that need addressing (in no particular order) are:

1. The MDBA promised a guide with 21 volumes. There are 20 missing. No technical background or localised valley information.
2. The MDBA says there is an "urgent" need for a comprehensive assessment of community and industry impacts.ⁱ Ahem, aren't you meant to have done that?
3. Take away a third of the water = 800 lost jobs. On the MDBA's own numbers, that is one job for every \$1 million of lost production.ⁱⁱ Seriously? Please provide the evidence behind this number and then burn it.
4. Why is some 500 GL of recovered environmental water from The Living Murray program not included in offsets against SDLs?ⁱⁱⁱ
5. Environmental works and measures are mentioned^{iv} but no suggestions on what can be done to save water. This is critical – it's not just irrigators who have to get more efficient.
6. 29 photo credits, but no bibliography, footnote or a single scientific or data reference.
7. The Water Act says we must "optimise economic, social and environmental outcomes" yet the MDBA's definition is "maximising the benefit to the environment while minimising the economic and social impacts"^v. No balance there.
8. Environmental Watering Plan – one of three key elements in the Plan but not even an overview provided. How is all this water to be used?
9. *Water for the Future* is not \$12.6 billion for the Basin^{vi}. At least \$3 billion of that is for urban and non-basin projects.
10. Many figures on current diversion limits vary wildly with current Cap limits. Please explain.

Mr O'Brien said it would be impossible to have meaningful consultation on the plan until these issues and many others were addressed.

“At the very least we need all the reports available so people can read the detail on their own local area. This guide is not a good start to an open and transparent process.”

Mr O’Brien urged all Basin residents to attend the public information sessions starting this week in Shepparton (Tuesday), Deniliquin (Wednesday), Griffith (Thursday) and Renmark (Friday) to ensure they understand the proposals in the guide and to let the MDBA and government know what some of the impacts will be.

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ⁱ Guide to the proposed Basin Plan, page XXVIII

ⁱⁱ Pg XXVII. The Guide estimates a drop in irrigated production of \$805 million p.a.

ⁱⁱⁱ Pg 153

^{iv} Pg 194

^v Pg 107

^{vi} Pg XII