

Concern over foreshadowed Opposition Basin Plan Amendments

The National Irrigators' Council (NIC) says amendments to the Basin Plan proposed by the Opposition are not helpful to reaching a long-term triple bottom line outcome.

NIC CEO Steve Whan said "this week the Shadow Minister for Water has said he is considering introducing an amendment formally linking the 450GL of water known as 'up water' to the 650GL 'down water' provision.

"The legislation and agreements governing this process already include significant hurdles to achieving the Sustainable Diversion Limit (SDL) reductions needed for the 650GL 'down water'. These include the ability of a party to the agreement blocking any, or all of, the SDL initiatives if they are not happy.

"That puts the power with the Basin states including South Australia.

"Shadow Minister Burke was the Minister who delivered this agreement and it is not surprising that he has deep and passionate views. But he must also recognise that there will continue to be robust debate – as there was when he was Minister.

"It is important that robust debate doesn't produce an overreaction which breaks down the Federal bipartisanship that made the agreement possible.

"The view of Basin communities and irrigators – including NIC's South Australian members - is that it is reasonable to demand delivery of the assurance made by then Prime Minister Gillard and then Minister Burke, that they would "ensure there is no social and economic downside for communities".

"NIC is concerned that the impact test, based as it is on an individual property owner participating in water recovery, does not adequately meet a commitment to "communities".

"We all need to learn from the experience of implementing the first part of the Plan and that learning shows that an individual property-based test is not the same as assessing community impact.

"MDBA Northern Basin studies are now confirming significant socio economic impacts. That information wasn't there when the legislation passed Parliament.

"In the past Tony Burke has shown a deep understanding of broad community impacts on Basin communities, NIC would hope he can acknowledge the potential for flaws in the current legislated test.

"NIC recognises that with a tense and difficult issue like the Basin Plan there will be argy bary and we respect Tony Burke's experience and knowledge, however we also expect to see Labor taking stronger account of impacts on the jobs and lives of people, side by side with concern for the environment. We look forward to continuing to discuss with the Opposition NICs desire for a genuine triple bottom line outcome in this process."

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