

Irrigators' Council Says Northern Basin Amendments Must Consider River and Community Health

The National Irrigators' Council (NIC) has welcomed recognition by the Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) in its Northern Basin amendments of negative socio-economic impact from water buybacks and the need for measures other than 'just add water' to improve the environment.

NIC CEO Steve Whan said "the MDBA's Northern Basin review has finally given official recognition to the severe social and economic impacts on communities of water buybacks. Official recognition is welcome because it confirms what the communities themselves have been living every day.

NIC has lodged its [submission on the proposed Northern Basin amendments](#). It reiterates the organisations' strong view that water recovery has gone far enough in the Northern Basin, and that improving the environmental health of the river system will not be helped by just adding water.

"The recovery of 278GL to date has cost the Northern Basin \$139 million annually in lost farm-gate production. Based on a conservative 3:1 multiplier effect, this accounts for over \$400 million lost to communities in the Northern Basin annually.

"Let's remember this is more than just numbers, this is a direct impact on people and communities. Less families have incomes and that means their standard of living has dropped and many have moved away, kids have less opportunities and there are fewer services. The changes have resulted in increased social disadvantage for children and families in inland communities in Northern NSW and Southern Qld.

"NIC isn't saying turn the clock back, nor are we saying improving the health of the river system should not be an ongoing priority. Quite the opposite, we want a healthier river system and our submission advocates strong measures to achieve it.

"It is welcome that the MDBA proposal recognises that improving the health of the rivers is about more than just releasing more water.

"NIC has consistently pointed out that, for example, just releasing more cold water from the bottom of a dam can actually hurt the capacity of native fish to breed and encourage carp. That's not helpful and it's just one of the areas where action other than releasing water needs to be supported.

NIC is advocating leaving water recovery in the Northern Basin at 278GL which is 86% of the new target proposed by the MDBA. A lot has already been achieved on recovery in the Northern basin and the next steps need to tackle the tougher jobs of improving the environment without forgetting that people are affected too."

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