

Ministers can put basin plan back on track

National Irrigators' Council (NIC) has urged ministers to take a balanced and constructive approach to the basin water ministers meeting in Albury tomorrow (Tuesday 19 December).

NIC CEO, Steve Whan, says "recent media coverage on the basin has tended to focus on an overly negative view of progress. It is a view not supported by the evidence coming out of environmental observations and the independent authorities implementing the plan.

"Environmental reports from the MDBA, fish researchers and even the Wentworth Group report, show that environmental watering events are having a positive result. The MDBA review points to almost 300 environmental watering events over three years supporting native fish populations and [Victorian research by the Arthur Rylah Institute](#) shows "*a general increase in abundance and distribution for many priority species including Silver Perch, Murray River Rainbowfish, Murray Cod and Golden Perch across the waterways since 2012.*"

"We need to recognise, though, that we are five years in to the 12-year implementation of the plan and environmental recovery will take many years.

"That means it is important now to stay the course and reiterate support for the steps which always been a part of the plan, including implementation of the northern basin review and the SDL adjustment measures.

"The Federal Parliament will be considering both key steps next year. If either or both are disallowed that will put in serious doubt progress of the full Basin plan.

"Irrigators recognise that recent criticism of compliance needs strong action. NIC unequivocally supports strong compliance regimes. Water is a valuable asset and no one condones theft. Compliance will always be a priority. In the meantime, the exaggerated attempts to portray irrigators as bad guys should not be allowed to derail important steps toward achieving the Plan.

"Ministers have the opportunity to ensure that they put the basin plan back on track by endorsing the measures that they themselves have been a part of developing.

"The NIC also hopes Ministers will take the opportunity to consider an approach to the 450 GL 'Up-Water' enabling communities to move ahead with considering measures to achieve that target. Programs that would not cause negative socio-economic impacts or reduce the basin's capacity to produce the food and fibre we consume and export."

Media Contact: Steve Whan 0429 780 883
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