



## Media Release

### 'Economic boost' welcomed but will fall short of damage done

**9 December 2024, Canberra ACT:** The announcement of \$160 million for Southern NSW communities targeted by Government water buybacks for an additional 450 GL, is welcomed by the National Irrigators' Council (NIC) but they warn, it will not make up for the damage.

"Removing water from agriculture has enormous flow-on impacts throughout communities, which cannot simply be patched up with one-off handouts," said NIC CEO, Zara Lowien.

"In the communities targeted, there's just no substitute for water."

Earlier this year the Australian Government released an update to the Regulatory Impact Statements for the Murray Darling Basin Plan, estimating the economic impact of between \$602M - \$914M less annually<sup>1</sup> from the Plan's implementation.

"We are concerned that programs like this are simply tokenistic to give the impression that socio-economic impacts are being managed, and with such little funding compared with the potential impact, it's hard to see it any other way," said Ms Lowien.

This funding is available for nine eligible LGAs in Southern NSW only: Carrathool, Murrumbidgee, Balranald, Hay, Griffith, Leeton, Berrigan, Murray River, Edward River.

"We know these areas have been hit hard by water reforms, so it's absolutely important they receive economic support, but this is not enough to make up for the damage,"

"We don't want to see more rose bushes or silo art, but genuine strategic and long-term investment for local economies that mitigates the lost jobs and income from water recovery,"

"The Federal Water Minister promised parliament that no community would be left behind and communities outside these nine local government areas should question what is the plan for them, when the remaining \$140 million of the Sustaining Communities Program must be shared across the rest of New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and even Queensland",

"It won't be enough to scratch the surface," said Ms Lowien.

The Basin Plan has recovered 1 in 3 litres of irrigation water, reducing total diversions to just 28% of inflows, well within global standards – yet the Federal Government continues their relentless pursuit of additional water buybacks, free from any focus on environmental outcomes, at the expense of targeted communities and Australia's food and fibre production capabilities.

"With the Sustainable Diversion Limits now achieved, it's time to shift focus to value add for the environment, but the Government continues to apply the same tools and ignore the opportunity to invest in real improvements through complementary measures."

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<sup>1</sup> Office of Impact Assessment Addendum for 450GL scenarios via <https://oia.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/posts/2024/06/Addendum.pdf> together with the original RIS via MDBA <https://www.mdba.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/Basin-Plan-RIS-Nov2012.pdf>