



Media Release

National Irrigators' Council welcomes MDBA's refreshed approach on constraints, calls for firm Government commitments

19 December 2024, Canberra ACT: National Irrigators' Council (NIC) has welcomed the refreshed approach proposed by the Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) to relax delivery constraints in the Murray-Darling Basin to value add environmental benefits for rivers and floodplains but warns that firm commitments from Basin governments are critical to ensure the program's momentum is not lost.

"The MDBA has delivered an honest account of the challenges the constraints relaxation program has faced" said Zara Lowien, CEO of NIC. "We support their efforts, but the refreshed process will only succeed if Basin governments reach agreement and commit to a new approach."

NIC agrees with the MDBA that any new program for constraints relaxation must be community-driven, focused on cost-effective achievable outcomes, and include clear accountability and transparency. "Clear program design principles focused from the ground-up at the outset could have avoided a decade of uncertainty and project delays," Ms Lowien added.

"We urge Basin governments to commit to this new roadmap, to ensure there is clarity and certainty to the constraints program and its offsets beyond 2026. We cannot afford another setback due to lack of funding or ongoing inter-governmental disagreements and poor coordination."

"There is a tenuous thread of momentum right now that must be maintained not politicised," she said.

NIC also supports MDBA's proposal for independent input and a community-driven process, particularly as local impacts must be acknowledged and mitigated. "The proposal to have independent input will be needed to regain trust within impacted communities. Community support will be essential, and its clear more time will be needed to address concerns and explore mitigation options or alternatives," said Ms Lowien.

Additionally, NIC welcomes the consideration of new tools to achieve environmental outcomes, encouraging the MDBA to expand the scope of the independent panel to consider options such as maximizing natural flows and direct pumping. "With over a decade of experience in managing environmental water, it's time to explore complementary measures that can enhance environmental outcomes and benefit all stakeholders."

"The next phase of Basin management must leverage the lessons learned and the additional 2,100 gigalitres of environmental water now available," Ms Lowien concluded. "But first, we need certainty from Basin governments on the future of the constraints relaxation program to ensure progress."

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The MDBA state: "Relaxing constraints in the Murray–Darling Basin's rivers is necessary to maximising environmental outcomes using water recovered under the Basin Plan 2012. In 2023 the Basin Plan was amended to require the Authority to prepare a Constraints Relaxation Implementation Roadmap (this Roadmap) by 31 December 2024... relaxing constraints is essential to achieving the Basin Plan's goals of protecting and restoring rivers and to ensuring maximum utility and benefit is gained from water that is recovered for the environment." MDBA 2024, Constraints Relaxation Implementation Roadmap <https://www.mdba.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/constraints-relaxation-implementation-roadmap.pdf>