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## Time for a reality check

The release of the MDBA's Constraints Management Strategy annual report shows it is time for bureaucrats and Basin Ministers to stop and take a reality check according to Murray Irrigation Chairman, Bruce Simpson.

The Constraints Management Strategy annual report was published by the MDBA on Tuesday 9 December with recommendation for the Basin governments to focus on River Murray constraints as a priority.

"Clearly the River Murray is an easy target and ticks all the MDBA's boxes to focus their efforts on delivering flows across the border, rather than to get basin-wide environmental outcomes," Mr Simpson said.

"But only addressing River Murray constraints means the MDBA still needs Mother Nature to deliver rainfall events and tributary flows to actually make a difference.

"And if Mother Nature is going to do that for us, she will do it regardless of whether there is a constraints management strategy in place."

Mr Simpson explained that Murray Irrigation initially supported the development of the Constraints Management Strategy as an opportunity to undertake a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis of how much it would cost to achieve the high flows the MDBA said were needed to achieve better outcomes.

"Unfortunately, what they have produced is a very simplistic outline of impacts, cost estimates based on 'generic assumptions' and threats to try and force Basin States to change fundamental river and water licence management policies. It is unacceptable," he said.

"It is completely lacking in terms of looking at community costs and flow-on costs.

"The report talks briefly about unquantified and uncosted benefits to the community from healthier waterways and wetlands and 'upgraded creek crossings' but not about the costs to the community from potential negatives such as increased infrastructure maintenance and the inconvenience costs relating to regional access, not just farm access.

"Then there is the 'cost sharing'<sup>1</sup> that the report barely mentions. What that really means is that if farmers or the community want to keep their access road, they need to stump up some of the costs to do so – even though the access issue is a direct result of Government policy.

"We understand addressing constraints should be about delivering better environmental outcomes, but at what real cost?

"Thankfully all the MDBA can do is make recommendations, it is up to the States to agree to the implementation of any constraints management measures.

"We strongly urge the NSW Government not to sign up to any of the recommendations without first resolving issues of liability and then consulting with stakeholders to ensure there are no negative third party impacts to an individual's property rights, physical property or the reliability of access and delivery of water allocations," said Mr Simpson.

"It is time for all Governments to take a breath, look at what they can achieve right now, with all the water they hold and make the best use of that before committing to measures that have the very real potential of costing tax-payers and river communities much more than the incremental environmental benefit that may, or may not, be achieved," Mr Simpson said.

**Ends.**

For more information contact Murray Irrigation Communications Supervisor, Catharine Heffernan on T. 1300 138 265.

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<sup>1</sup> Constraints Management Strategy annual progress report 2013-14, MDBA, p13