

Media release



Murray Irrigation

Thursday 22 January 2015

Hope for change under new MDBA Chair

It is hoped that the culture within the Murray-Darling Basin Authority will become more sympathetic to regional communities with the announcement today (22 January 2015) of South Australian irrigator, Neil Andrew as Chair.

Environment Minister Greg Hunt announced Mr Andrew, an irrigator and former Federal Member for the South Australian seat of Wakefield, would commence a four-year term as Chair of the MDBA highlighting his public sector, governance and irrigated agricultural experience.

"We hope that Mr Andrew will be able to significantly shift the culture within the MDBA so that, as an organisation, they are more aware of the impact their actions and recommendations have on regional communities," Bruce Simpson, Chairman of Murray Irrigation said.

"We have long been calling for a shift in focus within the MDBA to move away from the 'just add water' approach and start looking at finding ways to effectively deliver the water they have without flooding farms and families," Mr Simpson said.

"Mr Andrew will have a lot of challenges ahead, not least of which will be managing the recommendations of the Constraints Management Strategy and ensuring the SDL adjustment mechanism is robust and effective.

"Those two implementation issues alone could mean the difference between this area seeing 30 percent of productive water transferred to the environment or more than 40 percent," he said.

Mr Simpson acknowledged that there may be some concern with the announcement of a South Australian to the top job responsible for implementing a plan that many see as a plan for the Lower Lakes.

"The reality is that, while he is South Australian, Mr Andrew is an irrigator and if there is one thing the Basin Plan has done, it has been to unite irrigators across state lines because we are all confronted with substantial loss of water in the consumptive pool and we are all feeling the impact," he said.

"In saying that, it will be important for him to get out and about on the ground with other irrigators to hear our local concerns and see what impact the Basin Plan has had already in our communities.

"Make no mistake, this is a big job and we hope Mr Andrews has the stamina and the passion to effect real change.

"Without a change in focus, irrigation communities across all states will continue to decline while the recovered water is left to merely flow down the river channel with no significant environmental improvement," Mr Simpson said.

Ends.

Contact: Catharine Heffernan, Communications Supervisor: T. 03 5898 3342