



Thursday 5 February 2015

Baldwin shown specifics: challenge accepted

Murray Irrigation accepted the challenge from the new Parliamentary Secretary to the Environment Minister, Bob Baldwin, to be specific and show him things that can be addressed in the roll-out of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan¹.

Mr Baldwin reiterated the Government's commitment to deliver the Plan in full saying broad rhetoric would not change that objective, but he was open to hearing about things that can be addressed as part of the implementation.

While acknowledging that in an ideal world, the Plan would be halted, Murray Irrigation Chairman Bruce Simpson identified three key areas of concern that can be changed to minimise negative impacts without the need to halt the Plan.

"Firstly, the Government must legislate to cap buyback at 1,500GL to give irrigators the certainty that the worst form of water recovery in terms of economic impact is only used as the option of absolute last resort – and preferably never again," Mr Simpson said.

"Mr Baldwin said he needed the support of cross-bench senators to get legislation through the Parliament so we gave the same message to independent Senator John Madigan when he was in Deniliquin on Wednesday (4 February).

"There are no more excuses to delay that legislation and formalise the focus of water recovery through infrastructure investment," he said.

The second item on Murray Irrigation's list is the SDL adjustment mechanism that allows the volume of water recovery to be adjusted to recognise where the same environmental outcomes can be achieved with less water through engineering solutions.

"The SDL adjustment mechanism offers hope that the amount of water recovery from this region can be reduced at the same time as achieving significant environmental outcomes by actively managing environmental water delivery instead of aiming for wide-spread and damaging floods," Mr Simpson said.

"While the States propose projects, it is the MDBA, under Mr Baldwin's jurisdiction, that is developing the assessment methodology and it is up to Mr Baldwin to ensure they take a practical approach to that task."

"Lastly, and also in desperate need of a practical approach is the Constraints Management Strategy," he said.

"Currently the strategy is all about how to get water over the banks, across the system and to the end.

"It should not be about that. It should be about looking at where you will get the best returns for investment without damage.

"Our region is a perfect example of where there are practical solutions to local delivery constraints, such as using or upgrading existing infrastructure to maximise environmental benefits, without the need for damaging floods and negative third party impacts.

"Constraints management should not be about trying to exceed constraints, it should be about identifying how you can work in and around them to get results."

Mr Simpson said Murray Irrigation met Mr Baldwin's challenge to show him specifics and hoped in return to see the three areas addressed to minimise the potential negative impacts of the Basin Plan.

Mr Baldwin and the new MDBA Chairman Neil Andrew toured Murray Irrigation's area of operations and the neighbouring Koondrook-Perricoota Forest on Tuesday 3 February.

Ends:

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¹¹ As reported: Southern Riverina News, 4 February 2014, "Give me proof": <http://www.mmg.com.au/local-news/finley/govt-will-push-ahead-with-mdbp-1.87366>