



Australian Dairy Industry Council Inc.

Media Release

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Dairy industry calls for water buyback suspension

For immediate release

The Australian dairy industry is urging the Federal Government to suspend non-strategic water buybacks immediately in the Murray Darling Basin, as recommended by the parliamentary Regional Australia committee investigating the proposed Basin Plan.

The industry welcomed the report by the committee, chaired by independent MP Tony Windsor, and called on Federal Water Minister Tony Burke to act on recommendations to improve the performance of his Department with more timely funding for water-saving projects.

Director of the Australian Dairy Industry Council, Adrian Drury, said the Basin Plan needed to be more than just a scientific experiment in environmental watering on a large scale.

“It also needs to promote regional economic development and growth,” he said. “So far, the focus has been too much on simply encouraging people to leave farming.”

Ultimately, the primary test that the dairy industry will apply to the draft Basin Plan is whether it allows for a vibrant and growing agricultural sector to operate across the Basin. This includes detailed analysis of whether the Plan will facilitate the conditions required for economic growth and the equal weighting of economic, social and environmental objectives.

In particular, the dairy industry supports the Windsor committee’s call for the Murray Darling Basin Authority and the Commonwealth Government to:

- Focus greater investment in on- and off-farm water saving projects.
- Develop a community engagement strategy tailored for each catchment community, with meaningful opportunities for local communities to contribute to the Plan’s design.
- Develop localised and targeted structural adjustment packages, and localised economic development plans supported by workforce development and training packages.
- Focus greater investment into research and development to improve irrigation efficiency.
- Improve the data on groundwater availability, use and connectivity to surface water.
- Apply greater rigour to the assumptions underpinning the proposed sustainable diversion limits.

Mr Drury said the Government’s move to smaller, rolling rounds of tenders for buybacks earlier this year was effectively just more of the same approach taken for the last few years.

“The Government should limit itself to strategic purchases linked directly to water-saving infrastructure projects or community-led decommissioning of channels or districts,” Mr Drury said.

“Further general tenders for water buyback should only be undertaken after water-saving projects are completed and assessed, and the environmental response using the existing pool of purchased water has been evaluated,” he said.

“The Federal Government must also undertake an assessment of practical environmental management constraints, such as the limited capacity to release large volumes from dams for environmental watering events and the flooding risks for private land.”

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