

Media Release

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Proposed Water Act amendment puts cart before the horse on Basin Plan

For immediate release

The Federal Government needs to reveal the deal on the Basin Plan before Parliament votes on amending the Water Act, the Australian Dairy Industry Council said today.

ADIC president Chris Griffin said Parliament and stakeholders first had to be confident that the Basin Plan actually delivered what the ministerial council intended.

“We know there is widespread political support for a combination of up to 2100GL in entitlements and at least 650GL in environmental works and measures,” Mr Griffin said.

“We want to be confident that the Basin Plan and associated documents clearly and unambiguously set out how this will be achieved, before a vote on amending the Water Act.

“We also want to be sure that water saved from any additional infrastructure works will count first towards closing the gap to the 2750GL benchmark, before any is credited towards environmental outcomes beyond that goal.”

ADIC Basin Taskforce Chair Daryl Hoey said the dairy industry was wary of giving the Murray Darling Basin Authority the final say on adjusting the Sustainable Diversion Limit (SDL), given its poor record on consultation.

“Unfortunately, the Authority has a history of making a show of listening, even to senior Basin officials, but then just doing what it wants regardless,” Mr Hoey said.

“It also has a history of moving the goalposts. We are especially dismayed by its attempt to exclude The Living Murray works as environmental offsets, despite telling us all for more than a year that these works would be counted to help reduce buybacks.

“For this reason, any Water Act amendment must require the Authority to do more than just consult with the Basin Officials Committee – it must also comply with reasonable requests.

“We think it is also important that the Water Minister, at least, retains some discretion on SDL adjustments, otherwise the Authority will be even more a power unto itself.”

Mr Hoey also said the SDL adjustment mechanism must allow a plus/minus variation of at least 6%, not the 5% proposed in the amendment.

“Otherwise it is only possible for the surface water SDL to be adjusted by 540GL, not the full 650GL in environmental offsets,” he said.

Mr Hoey explained that the amendment rolled surface and groundwater SDLs together for the purposes of a net +/-5% adjustment, giving a potential variation of 710GL. "But this aggregation is not hydrologically or scientifically sound, and should not be supported."

He said new measures in the amended Basin Plan that potentially neutralise the capacity to adjust the SDL by the full 650GL must also be removed. Examples include the undefined 'initial conditions of development' and arbitrary 'safety net' provisions.

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