



MEDIA RELEASE

Outcome Review needed as \$1.3 billion buyback blowout looms

26 November 2025, Canberra, ACT – The National Irrigators' Council is calling for an independent review of program outcomes, after a statutory review on the Water for the Environment Special Account (WESA) found an additional \$1.3 billion would be needed to buy an additional 450 gigalitres, beyond what is required to achieve Sustainable Diversion Limits (SDLs) in the Murray Darling Basin.

"The report findings call into question the Government focus on just water, with a \$1.3 billion blowout, and their own science saying priorities have shifted¹," said NIC CEO Zara Lowien.

"We are calling on the Federal Government to put today's science ahead of past politics, to join with the diverse range of stakeholders who support moving forward with environmental investment, away from just adding water".

"SDLs have been achieved, costs for additional water are surging, and new science from the MDBA confirm the Basin is more complex than first assumed and that water alone will not be sufficient,²"

"A review of WESA policy outcomes is needed now, to clearly link how funding and water recovery will actually deliver for the Basin's environment and communities and inform next-years Basin Plan Review".

The Independent Review of the WESA also found; *Whether the government does so [meets the target] will depend largely on how it balances its obligation under the Water Act to take all reasonable steps to increase environmental water by 450 GL/y with its other obligations and priorities, as well as budget considerations.*

"The question everyone needs to ask is, what is reasonable? If we had another \$1.3 billion to invest in the Murray Darling Basin is the priority?"

"Funding must be prioritised, today's science highlights that we must better enable water deliver of water for the environment and must target today's key degradation drivers, which means moving beyond 'just adding water'," said Ms Lowien.

"If the Auditor General struggled to find a link between water purchases to achieve SDLs and environmental policy objectives³, the optional extra buybacks should be cause for concern and another reason, why we are calling for a review that looks specifically into the policy outcomes, now."

"We must understand what can be achieved with any more additional water and if that's the best option forward, which is over and above the targets and financial considerations, that are the Government's focus," said Ms Lowien.

Ends.

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¹ 2025 Basin Plan Evaluation | Murray–Darling Basin Authority

² P 4.

³ https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Tabled_Documents/9337