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**Minister Burke must take the lead on proposed Basin Plan**

The Rural Alliance is calling on the Federal Government to redraft the Guide to the Proposed Murray Darling Basin Plan, in a way that takes communities and the environment into equal account.

Rural Alliance Chairman Charles Armstrong says rural and regional communities are being left in limbo by the prolonged uncertainty surrounding the Guide.

“Minister Burke has stated he’s received legal advice that the Murray Darling Basin Authority is able to deliver a balanced Basin Plan,” Mr Armstrong said.

“This assurance has provided little comfort to communities, with the Guide causing anxiety and having a negative impact on business confidence,” Mr Armstrong said.

Country Women’s Association State President Elaine Armstrong says Basin communities must be assured the security of their future livelihoods is being taken into account.

“The social and economic implications of potential job losses and the flow-on effect on health services, schools and businesses must not be ignored,” Mrs Armstrong said.

Livestock and Bulk Carriers Association President Barney Hayes says the current uncertainty will have a negative affect on the whole supply chain - from farmers; to transport operators; to consumers.

“You just need to look at what impact the drought had on transport operators in many parts of the basin,” Mr Hayes said.

“Many of the well established operators left the industry all together because of the reduced production.

“Now when we’re starting to get back on our feet, this may happen all over again,” Mr Hayes said.

The Alliance is calling on the Government to take immediate action by disclosing details of how balance will be achieved in a new collaborative planning process.

“We feel that’s important with the MDBA suggesting it may need more time to finalise the Plan, which could see the process delayed until 2012,” Mr Armstrong said.

“We welcome the Minister’s commitment to producing a balanced Plan, but are yet to see how he intends on achieving a better outcome.

“Any redraft must reconsider the proposed Sustainable Diversion Limits, to achieve the desired outcome of a Plan that balances social, economic and environmental outcomes equally,” Mr Armstrong said.

*The Alliance was formed in 2006, and is made up of the Livestock and Bulk Carriers Association, Australian Livestock and Property Agents Association, NSW Business Chamber, Royal Flying Doctor Service South Eastern Section, Country Women's Association of NSW, Shires Association of NSW, Landcare NSW, Isolated Children's Parents' Association, NatRoad, NSW Irrigators' Council and NSW Farmers' Association.*



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