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Wentworth report dangerously one sided

The NSW Farmers' Association says suggestions by the Wentworth Group that massive cuts be made to irrigation water don't consider rural communities.

NSW Farmers' Association President Charles Armstrong says the calls highlight the extreme position adopted by some environmental stakeholders in relation to the Murray Darling Basin.

"Farmers agree that environmental values in the river systems are important, but so is the ability of Australia to produce food and fibre," Mr Armstrong said.

"The impacts of cuts in irrigation water on jobs in farming and associated businesses in our regional towns must also be considered," he said.

ABARE has recorded that in 2005-06, 39% of the gross value of Australia's agricultural production came from the Basin, with a value of \$38.5 billion.

"Cuts of 65% in the Murrumbidgee Valley, as suggested by the Wentworth Group would be catastrophic for towns like Griffith. The social and economic impacts on towns in the Murray Darling Basin must be considered when attempting to allocate additional water to wetlands in South Australia.

"This extreme position highlights the critical need for balance in this discussion. Any discussion about removing water from its current use must also include the impacts of removing this water.

"These impacts range from community employment and dislocation to impacts on mental health, and they cannot be overlooked.

"A fair and balanced Basin Plan requires a fair and balanced process.

"The NSW Farmers' Association is calling for a process that engages local communities in planning their irrigation futures and which genuinely balances social, economic and environmental outcomes," Mr Armstrong concluded.

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