

Issue

NSW Farmers has a range of expectations of the Proposed Basin Plan that will ultimately determine whether or not NSW Industry will be able to support the Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) and the Federal Government in delivering this game changing reform. This document outlines NSW Farmers' expectations and will be used to assess the Proposed Basin Plan once it has been released.

Background

NSW Farmers has always supported a balanced Basin Planning process. Unfortunately, when the Guide to the Proposed Basin Plan (the 'Guide') was released in October 2010 the process outlined within it was anything but balanced. It was primarily for this reason that the Guide was almost unanimously rejected, not only by agricultural stakeholders, but also by community and business groups and State Governments, even receiving criticism from the Federal Minister responsible for the *Water Act 2007*, the Hon Tony Burke MP.

NSW Farmers has spent a lot of time over the past twelve months communicating our concerns with the Guide for the MDBA and Government via numerous submissions, letters and meetings. The MDBA now has a new Chairman in Craig Knowles, and a new CEO in Rhondda Dickson and the language coming from the MDBA has been encouraging. Unfortunately however, as the impending release of the Proposed Basin Plan approaches and more information is 'leaked' about the process, it is becoming increasingly clear that very little appears to have changed in the 12 months following the release of the Guide.

While NSW Farmers will await the release of the Proposed Basin Plan before deciding whether or not to support this process, these 'Key Basin Plan Expectations', as outlined below, will play a significant role in determining our position.

Key Basin Plan Expectations

1. Triple Bottom Lining Planning

NSW Farmers remains committed to a triple bottom line approach to planning that gives equal weighting to social, economic and environmental factors across the Basin. Also known as the 'people, planet, and profit model' a triple bottom line approach to planning was a fundamental part of the National Water Initiative which was the precursor for the *Water Act 2007*, and subsequently the entire Basin Planning process.

Whilst many analysts have interpreted that the *Water Act 2007* prevents a triple bottom line approach, Minister Burke has provided public guarantees that it can be delivered and we have not had cause to question this guarantee. However, all indications from our MDBA briefings to date suggest that little has changed in terms of incorporating a triple bottom line approach to Basin planning. If this is the case, and the Proposed Basin Plan is not supported by credible socio-economic analysis, NSW Farmers will be left with no choice but to oppose the Proposed Basin Plan.

2. A Focus on Outcomes, not Numbers

In NSW Farmers view, one of the biggest failures of the Guide was the almost singular focus on numbers and 'end of system flows' with little or no discussion of the environmental outcomes being sought, what volume was required to achieve these outcomes, and how this water could be delivered. We have never been prepared to discuss numbers because we don't believe we have been provided with the information necessary to facilitate this discussion.

For NSW Farmers to be able to accept the Proposed Basin Plan it must contain a comprehensive, plain English analysis of each and every environmental asset in the Basin, how much water it will require and how regularly it must be watered. Rural people are, by their very nature practical and sensible; if there is a

need for water to be taken out of productive use this must be clearly and carefully explained. Anything less and NSW Farmers cannot support the Proposed Basin Plan.

3. Improved Efficiency of the Lower Lakes

NSW Farmers has called on the MDBA to facilitate a discussion on the Lower Lakes in South Australia and the range of options for reducing their requirement for fresh water.

Regardless of competing views on this subject, many rural and regional people within NSW believe that the environmental needs of the Lower Lakes would be much better addressed via environmental works and measures within the Lakes themselves.

A significant body of work exists from numerous different authors outlining a range of engineering solutions for the Lower Lakes; one of the most significant is this 2000 report commissioned by the Murray Darling Basin Commission, titled- [An evaluation of environmental flow needs in the Lower Lakes and Coorong](#). This report outlines a range of suggestions for improving the efficiency of the Lower Lakes system, whilst also maintaining the reliability of Adelaide's water supply. Why the recommendations outlined in this report appear not to have been carried out remains a mystery.

If the view held by NSW Farmers on this issue is misplaced, it is the MDBA's responsibility to explain why, but continuing to ignore this matter will not make it go away. Unless the questions surrounding the Lower Lakes can be answered, NSW Farmers will find it difficult to support the Proposed Basin Plan.

4. Avoidance of Flooding Risks Associated with Environmental Watering

NSW Farmers is becoming increasingly concerned about the flooding risks to private land associated with the delivery of environmental water via the Basin Plan. We are already hearing reports from members who have been adversely impacted by environmental watering practices and on the basis of discussions with Mr Knowles and the Authority to date we are concerned that this will only increase as the Basin Planning process continues.

While NSW Farmers has received a briefing from the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder (CEWH), this has not satisfied us that the risks are being adequately dealt with and we are particularly concerned about an apparent disconnect between the MDBA and the CEWH. The MDBA appears to be taking the position that it is the CEWH's job to determine how and when water is delivered to environmental sites.

NSW Farmers questions how the MDBA can possibly determine the social and economic impacts of the Basin Plan without consideration of how and when the water will be delivered. Unless the Proposed Basin Plan contains a detailed plan for environmental watering, including the impacts that this watering is likely to cause and how these impacts could be minimised, NSW Farmers will not support the Proposed Basin Plan.

Where To From Here?

NSW Farmers will await the release of the Proposed Basin Plan to determine to what extent these (and other) expectations have been included within the planning process. If, as currently appears likely, these key expectations have not been adequately dealt with within the statutory instrument of the Proposed Basin Plan, NSW Farmers will have no alternative but to oppose the Proposed Basin Plan and pursue whatever means necessary to have it amended.

If the 'leaked' Sustainable Diversion Limit figures bear any resemblance to those that in the Proposed Basin Plan there can be no doubt that the impacts on a number of communities in NSW will be devastating. NSW Farmers will not sit back and watch rural and regional communities in this State destroyed where any question marks about the accuracy of the work underpinning these figures remains.