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Federal Government water announcement prompts concerns

NSW Farmers' Association has welcomed today's announcement by Prime Minister Julia Gillard for the Federal Government to purchase from farmers the difference between the current water use caps and the proposed Sustainable Diversion Limits (SDLs).

NSW Farmers' Association President Charles Armstrong said investing new money to purchase water in the Murray Darling Basin does not address concerns raised by regional communities about the cumulative economic and social impacts of removing water available for productive use.

"Without a draft Murray Darling Basin Plan (MDBP), inclusive of detail on the proposed SDLs, it is impossible to determine how this policy will look at the on farm and community level.

"Whilst the commitment to acquiring water in the marketplace will be welcome news for most farmers, the policy appears to reinforce the imbalanced nature of the Basin Planning process, whereby environmental considerations are a significantly higher priority than socio-economic considerations.

"Irrigators typically share infrastructure and the costs of maintaining that infrastructure. If more than a certain number of farmers in the system sell their water, the whole system becomes unviable.

"The policy does not appear to facilitate the integration of engineering works, specific watering strategies and land management practices to ensure efficient and effective use of environmental water," Mr Armstrong said.

The NSW Farmers' Association is continuing to call on the Federal Government to release the draft MDBP to provide certainty to farm families and rural communities throughout the Basin.

The NSW Farmers' Association is currently conducting an online survey to collate information regarding the socio- economic impacts of water cutbacks in the Murray Darling Basin.

Farmers across the Basin have until Sunday 29 August 2010 to complete the survey, which is available at <http://www.nswfarmers.org.au/surveys/mdb>.

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