



MEDIA RELEASE

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ZERO OUT OF TEN FOR DRAFT BASIN PLAN

Seven environment groups have described the draft Murray-Darling Basin Plan released today as a monumental failure for the rivers and the communities which depend on them.

The groups scored the draft Murray-Darling Basin Plan against 10 key tests which the Plan should meet to ensure the long-term health of rivers and communities (see below).

"The draft Basin Plan released today is a tragic failure for the rivers, wetlands, towns and communities of the Murray-Darling Basin" said Jonathan La Nauze, Murray-Darling campaigner with Friends of the Earth.

"The Plan has failed to meet any of the 10 key tests that we have identified as necessary to return the system to health. We thoroughly reject the draft Basin Plan in its current form - the Murray Darling Basin Authority has run up the white flag and given up on the river" he said.

"Here on the driest inhabited continent on earth the outcome of this reform will be pivotal to the future of the nation. Our long-term well-being depends on getting this right" said Ian Douglas, Co-ordinator Fair Water Use Australia.

"This will be a very expensive failure for the Australian taxpayer - \$8.9 billion has been allocated to return the rivers to health and it will be a scandalous waste of money if that is not achieved," he said.

"National water reform in this country is going off the rails and drastic action will be required now by the Federal Government to get it back on track" said Chris Daley, campaigner with The Wilderness Society Sydney.

"The most successful and cost-effective measure to return environmental flows to date has been voluntary water buybacks but these are now going to be put on ice according to announcements made by the Federal Environment Minister last week" he said.

"This Plan fails the environment - it will not stop salt building up and destroying the Coorong and Lower Lakes, it will not prevent the deaths of our iconic River Red Gum forests, it will not restore waterbirds or native fish populations" said Pepe Clarke, Chief Executive Officer with the Nature Conservation Council of NSW.

"The Plan also fails our communities - it will not provide good quality drinking water, it will not secure food production by floodplain graziers, it puts fishing and tourism industries at risk, and it will not ensure that Indigenous communities can continue cultural practices" he said.

For Comment

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10-PART TEST FOR THE MURRAY-DARLING BASIN PLAN

1. Puts the Murray-Darling on a sustainable footing
2. Delivers good quality drinking water to 3.4 million Australians
3. Flushes 2 million tonnes of salt out to sea each year
4. Maintains healthy River Red Gum forests and Black Box woodlands
5. Allows waterbirds to nest and breed on a regular basis and rebuild populations
6. Stops the decline in native fish and supports a sustainable fishing industry
7. Enables Indigenous communities to maintain cultural practices and derive socio-economic benefits
8. Supports floodplain graziers who are dependent on regular floods to produce food
9. Provides a basis for a thriving and diverse tourist industry
10. Allows enough water to adjust to a changing climate

OUTCOMES OF THE DRAFT PLAN AGAINST THE 10-PART TEST

1. Will not provide a sustainable future for the Murray-Darling, especially since it will double groundwater extraction limits to facilitate the mining industry
2. Weak 'aspirational' water quality objectives with no teeth that will not protect drinking water from salinity and algal blooms
3. Falls far short of the very minimum of 4,000GL required to flush 2 million tonnes of salt out to sea
4. High probability that Red Gum and Black Box forests will die, especially on the Lower Murray
5. Little or no improvement in waterbird numbers
6. Insufficient water for fish to reach floodplain for breeding, fishing industry at risk
7. Indigenous communities miss out, no provision of cultural water allocations
8. Continued threat to productivity and food production for floodplain graziers
9. Declining tourist industry with no security for its major attractions
10. Decline of up to 37% in run-off by 2030 due to climate change which has not been accounted for