



Niall Blair

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MEDIA RELEASE

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NSW SAYS BASIN PLAN FINALLY A DEAL FOR ALL

The NSW Government has today finalised negotiations on the Murray Darling Basin Plan, marking a historic day for Basin communities.

Minister for Regional Water, Niall Blair said today is the most significant step forward in delivery of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan since its inception in 2012.

“The negotiations are done. We now move to implementation. We now provide certainty for our communities,” Mr Blair said.

“States have been arguing about how much water can be used from the Basin since the 1860s, eventually leading to the Commonwealth Water Act in 2007, but that only set out the goals in the broadest terms, and the devil was always going to be in the detail.

“I commit to our regional communities today that the goal posts won’t move anymore and you can now decide if you want to ‘take a kick’ at them and invest in the opportunities afforded by certainty.

“This process has been tough and communities in NSW have paid a large price due to the previous politicking around the plan, but that stops today. Today we can move forward.

“From today we can capitalise on new opportunities and confidently say we are efficient, we are world-leading and we have widespread community support for producing the best irrigated food and fibre in the world.

“This isn’t a political outcome. This is a group of leaders who have used the political process to enhance the environmental, economic and the social well-being of our communities and for that I commend all of my colleagues and their respective governments.

“Today and in the lead-up, we’ve worked collectively towards an outcome without being distracted by the political opportunism that sadly we’ve seen too often in the past.”

The agreement will see all proposed efficiency projects that contribute to the 450 GL ‘upwater’ under the Basin Plan robustly assessed to ensure they have a positive or neutral outcome, based on detailed socio-economic criteria.

Efficiency programs aim to return up to 450 GL of water to the environment by changing water use practices. They include projects such as lining irrigation channels, reducing water leaks in Basin cities and installing meters.

In addition to today's deal, NSW is calling on the Commonwealth to decentralise the Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA).

Mr Blair said a plan like this shouldn't be implemented from a high-rise building in Canberra but from within a community that is affected by its decisions.

"We want those who are making decisions about communities to be part of those communities so they can incorporate local knowledge in their decision-making and not simply view the postcode as a number on a spreadsheet," Mr Blair said.

"Today we have negotiated something that benefits every state and every community rather than having local wins at the expense of others.

"The benefits of today's agreement probably won't be realised today, tomorrow or even next year but rather in the decades and centuries to come."

The NSW Government has also negotiated agreement on:

- **SDLAM Funding:** The Commonwealth has agreed to provide stage 1 funding towards the Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment Mechanism Projects (SDLAM) projects, including the Menindee Lakes Water Saving Project, enabling the NSW Government to collaborate with stakeholders to plan and design these projects to deliver environmental outcomes in the most sustainable way possible and ensuring that no more water than necessary is removed from production.
- **Water Resource Plans:** NSW will negotiate with the Commonwealth for additional time to allow communities to have their say on Water Resource Plans (WRPs). 20 of the 33 WRPs are to be delivered in NSW and eight NSW plans have already been placed on public exhibition, more than all other states combined. Despite the current crippling drought, the WRPs will be delivered by the end of 2019, with crucial elements, such as sustainable diversion limits, commencing by 1 July 2019.
- **Environmental Water Delivery & Constraints:** The Ministerial Council noted the challenges the MDBA has faced delivering water for the environment and other water users. The NSW Government and other members of the Council will continue to work together to find long-term solutions to the delivery of water in the Murray.

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