



**RICEGROWERS' ASSOCIATION
OF AUSTRALIA INC**

SUBMISSION TO THE MURRAY-DARLING BASIN AUTHORITY

Basin Plan Amendment Instrument 2017 (No 1)

February 2017

1. INTRODUCTION

The Ricegrowers' Association of Australia (RGA) welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the proposed amendments to the Murray-Darling Basin Plan (The Basin Plan), as outlined in the consultation documents issued by the Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) and the *Basin Plan Amendment Instrument 2017 (No 1)*.

The RGA is a member of the National Farmers' Federation, National Irrigators' Council and New South Wales Irrigators' Council and supports the submissions of these respective organisations.

2. THE RICEGROWERS' ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA

The RGA is the collective voice of rice growers in Australia. The RGA represents the interests of approximately 1200 voluntary members. The main objective of the RGA is to provide members with strong and effective representation on issues affecting the viability of their businesses, their communities and their industry.

The RGA is made up of nine branches located across the Riverina rice growing regions of NSW and a newly formed branch in QLD. Each branch annually elects representatives to form the RGA Central Executive. The Central Executive represents their respective branches in determining RGA policy and projects.

The NSW rice industry is reliant upon irrigation, mainly sourced from the Murray and Murrumbidgee valleys. Provided water is available, the NSW rice industry is considered one of the world's most successful rice growing industries, delivering significant yields while leading the world in water use efficiency as well creating habitat and ecosystems for a diverse range of wildlife including endangered species.



3. THE RGA'S POSITION

The RGA provides the following comments regarding the proposed amendments to The Basin Plan:

- A. The RGA supports the headline messages of the #MoreThanFlow campaign: Enough is enough. It is time to end unnecessary economic pain on irrigation dependent communities and invest in non-flow measures that will deliver real environmental

outcomes. Given the economic hardships being faced by many northern basin communities, taking further water out of production is just unacceptable.

Furthermore, the RGA believes that this position is as equally applicable to the communities of the Southern Basin as it is to those within the Northern Basin. The RGA hence supports the current work being undertaken by the Murray Darling Basin Authority to understand the socio-economic impacts of water recovery within the Southern Basin.

- B. The RGA strongly believes that the 'just add water' approach to environmental management is not working and it is time to make the most of the environmental water that has already been recovered and demonstrate real environmental outcomes.

The RGA strongly advocates for decision-makers to turn their attention to exploring opportunities to improve the health of the Murray Darling without hurting local communities. Better environmental outcomes can be achieved if 'non-flow' complementary measures are explored and implemented, without requiring any further water recovery.

Such measures include using infrastructure to direct the flow of environmental water, controlling feral animals in key wetland and floodplain areas, tackling carp infestations and recognising the significant environmental outcomes that can be achieved within the farming system, for example the Bitters in Rice project. Governments need to commit to exhausting these opportunities, instead of inflicting more social and economic damage on communities that rely on irrigation.

On this note, the RGA welcomes the initiative of the MDBA to explore a range of 'Toolkit Measures' to improve environmental outcomes without recovering further water. The RGA strongly urges the MDBA and decision makers to explore opportunities to replicate the 'Toolkit' for the Southern Basin.

- C. Noting the severe socio-economic impacts that has resulted for some communities in the Northern Basin, the RGA strongly urges the MDBA and decision makers to explore opportunities to fund community socio-economic adjustment and adaptation programs where impacts are identified. These programs should be implemented for both the Northern and Southern Basin.
- D. Finally the RGA does not support any proposal that seeks to change the characteristics of a water entitlement, regardless of whether the entitlement is held for productive and or environmental purposes. Doing so would set a dangerous precedent and risk resulting in third-party impacts for existing entitlements holders. Nevertheless, the RGA is not averse to Rule Changes provided there is close consultation with irrigators' and a mechanism to unwind these changes if 3rd party impacts emerge.

We thank you for the opportunity to provide comment regarding the *Basin Plan Amendment Instrument 2017 (No 1)*.

4. CONTACTS

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