

Policy & Reform

Current Water Policy Priorities



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MI is an active member of the [National Irrigators' Council](#), and also undertakes our own policy and advocacy services.

Our current top 5 water policy issues are:

1. Murray Darling Basin Plan

The implementation of the Basin Plan continues. Despite the centerpiece of the Basin Plan - SDLs - now being in force, and fully complied with, the Federal Government is continuing to purchase even more water from farmers.

Following the Restoring Our Rivers Act (2023), the Federal Government is seeking an additional 450 GL of environmental water, including through buybacks. This expands on the original 'efficiency measures' program, and is additional water beyond what is needed to 'bridge the gap' from previous levels of water use (the BDL) to the SDL.

The implementation of projects under the Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment Mechanism (SDLAM) also continues. These projects are important to the environmental outcomes of the Plan, as well as for offsetting the need for an additional 605 GL of water recovery in the Southern Basin. However, the design and delivery has been poor, and many projects lack community support.

MI is advocating for:

- No more water recovery from farmers
- Ensuring SDLAM achieves the full 605 GL, but in a way that is supported by the community and all impacted
- The Basin Plan review to recognize that you cannot 'just add water' to achieve environmental outcomes – instead we need a refocus to complementary measures (such as fish passageway, riparian land management, and fish screens).

2. Water Pricing

Under the current water pricing determination, water prices are set to skyrocket.

For the Murrumbidgee, proposed price increases by 2030 are:

- Regulated:
 - High security: 142% (19% annually)
 - General security: 130% (18% annually)
- Unregulated:
 - 99% (15% annually)
- Groundwater:
 - 97% (15% annually).

The proposed price increases are exorbitant and are far beyond the capacity and willingness to pay for water users.

MI is advocating to:

- Ensure water prices do not drastically increase,



- Develop a new model for water pricing - as the current model is not fit-for-purpose, becoming financially unviable, and results in water users paying a disproportionate share of water management costs.
- Achieve a greater share of costs paid for by the NSW Government, instead of water users, to reflect the contemporary use and management of water.

See our latest submission [here](#).

3. National Water Agreement

The National Water Initiative (NWI) is considered the blueprint to Australia's water management, and has underpinned major reforms at both State and Federal levels. It is an intergovernmental agreement signed by the Federal Government and States in 2004, following 10 years of design and development (following a 1994 COAG meeting). The NWI is commonly described as "best-practice", and was the foundation to many now standard features of water management, such as water property rights (distinct to land), statutory water plans, water markets, water recovery and sustainable extraction limits.

The Federal Government is in the processing of renewing the NWI, into what is now called the National Water Agreement (NWA).

MI is working with NIC to advocate for:

- The NWA to remain as a fit-for-purpose and best-practice blueprint to water management
- Maintain the key pillars of the water entitlement system
- Recognize the importance of water security for irrigated agriculture
- Move away from the heavy focus on water recovery, now SDLs have been achieved, and look to complementary measures and other ways to achieve environmental outcomes with available water.

See the latest NIC submission [here](#).

4. Water Sharing Plan reviews

The Water Sharing Plan for the Murrumbidgee Unregulated River is being renewed. MI has actively participated in this public consultation process.

You can see our submission [here](#).

A key issue for MI is a new concept of prescribing wetlands in the WSP, and thus imposing new regulatory requirements. There has been a lack of ground truthing in this process, which has resulted in significant errors in the identification of prescribed wetlands. Barren Box Storage and Wetland (an operational water storage for MI) has been captured by this process. There has also been no direct notification to parties impacted by this process – such as landholders or IIOs – which is an issue, given many of the proposed prescribed wetlands are on private property, within an IIO area of operations, or subject to other third-party impacts.

MI is seeking to collaborate with the NSW Government to communicate existing ways wetlands in our area are managed (both voluntarily and to meet existing requirements), and ensure environmental needs are being met without such regulatory burden or duplication.

You can see our submission to this process [here](#).

5. Floodplain Management Plan

The Murrumbidgee Valley Floodplain Management Plan (FMP) is also undergoing renewal. MI continues to actively participate in this public consultation process.



MI is advocating to ensure the FMP reflects the existing water supply works and drainage infrastructure that influences the movement of water across the landscape. The draft fails to do so accurately. Our position is that the FMP should not impede on the lawful ability of MI to manage and develop our network.

You can see our submission [here](#).