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Conservationists Commend Irrigation Leaders

The Australian Conservation Foundation has expressed delight with environmental works underway in the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area following a two-day tour organised by Murrumbidgee Irrigation Ltd.

ACF Executive Director, Don Henry, said that the group was very impressed, both with the environmental initiatives and the generosity of the community.

“It’s really important to have the chance to kick the dirt with farmers, share our concerns, and to see firsthand some of the tremendous conservation results in the area,” said Mr Henry.

Mr Henry said he was particularly impressed by the way Murrumbidgee Irrigation had shown leadership in finding a win-win solution to conserve water for irrigators and reinvest the savings in the natural environment.

Chairman of Murrumbidgee Irrigation, Dick Thompson in expressing his appreciation to ACF for their interest and encouragement in the MIA projects said “It’s great to be able to show people first hand what innovative thinking and collaborative partnerships can create. Our Barren Box redevelopment project is a classic example of a win for all parties including local landholders, government, indigenous groups and most significantly the environment.”

Mr Henry pointed to some highlights of environmental progress in the MIA:

- Barren Box Storage and Wetland: A massive undertaking to redevelop this degraded wetland ecosystem, through smart water management, returning a large part of the wetland to its natural ephemeral state, without reducing allocations to irrigators.
- Twenty thousand megalitres in efficiency savings from this project will be returned to the Snowy River.
- The Integrated Horticulture Supply programme, which aims to modernise irrigation infrastructure will generate significant dollar and environmental savings, with the added potential to tap into green power.
- The MIA EnviroWise and Ricegrowers’ Environmental Champions programmes are seeing farmers working in partnership with scientists as well as their own neighbours to restore wildlife habitat on farms.
- The Fivebough and Tuckerbil wetlands, where Murrumbidgee Irrigation is working with the local Wetlands Trust to give birdlife a fair go in this internationally important ecosystem.



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“We still have some big challenges ahead of us, and we won’t always see eye-to-eye, but we’re steadily building the trust to do the hard yards ahead,” said Mr Henry.

Mr Thompson said that the confidence of growers had been shaken lately with a prolonged drought, low prices for citrus and wine-grapes, and uncertainty about the way water would be managed in the future and that’s why being pro-active and innovative was essential for the sustainability of the region.

Mr Henry said that climate change was looming as a major risk for the MIA, and progress towards restoring a healthy working River Murray seemed to have stalled.

He said time was fast running out for much our native wildlife, but fair and sustainable solutions were within the country’s grasp.

“We know a lot of people on the land are doing their level best in difficult times, and we know our landscapes are struggling, but we’ve seen here in the Murrumbidgee how communities can work out a fairer deal for farmers and the environment when they put their minds to it,” said Mr Henry.

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