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Irrigators outraged over further delay to Basin Plan

The Murray Darling Basin Authority's decision to defer the release of a guide to the Basin Plan until after the Federal Election is a political decision that subverts the natural democratic process.

The National Irrigators' Council said it was angry the MDBA was further delaying the release of the guide to suit political sensitivities, a decision which would only increase uncertainty in Basin communities.

"We reject the assertion that the guide should not be released because of the caretaker convention," said NIC CEO, Danny O'Brien.

"This is not a policy change or decision by government, it is simply a guide to a draft and even the MDBA has made clear that it considers it a discussion paper.

"This Plan has long been scheduled for release mid-year and its deferral until after the election is unacceptable. We know the MDBA has sought legal advice on its obligations in caretaker mode – the Authority should release that advice in the interests of transparency.

"Political considerations should not affect a supposedly independent authority from releasing the guide. Indeed it is important that voters have an understanding of what is proposed going into the election so they can question candidates and political parties on their views on the draft Plan.

"It's an issue for all Australians not just those in the Basin – after all, the plan could have significant impacts on thousands of jobs, farms that have been in families for generations and potentially even the price of food.

"Irrigators and their communities are nervous about the content of the Basin Plan and the new sustainable diversion limits (SDLs) but they are equally sick of the speculation and uncertainty that is now building.

"Our members want to see the guide released as soon as possible so that they know what is proposed and how much, if any, water they are likely to lose, and so we can begin the debate about the proposed Plan.

"In the interests of transparency, all Australians have the right to know what is proposed before they cast their ballot. This is a bit like a government announcing a new tax, but not revealing the rate or who will pay it until after an election.

"We may, or may not, like the contents of the Plan once we see it, but in the interests of our communities – and our democracy – the guide should be released."

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