

20 July 2010

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For immediate release

ELECTION NO EXCUSE FOR DELAY OF BASIN PLAN GUIDE

Murrumbidgee Irrigation (MI) is appalled at today's decision by the Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) to defer the release of the Guide to the Proposed Basin Plan until after the election.

The MDBA stated the decision is "consistent with election caretaker period conventions." However, MI's Chairman, Mrs Gillian Kirkup, said MI's analysis of those conventions show no evidence of such a requirement.

"The election should have absolutely no bearing on the release of the Guide. If the Guide is almost ready, as we have been led to believe by the MDBA, then it should be made available in late July/early August as scheduled and advised. The Guide is simply that, a Guide. It's not a policy decision, significant appointment, nor is the Guide entering the government into a major contract or undertaking which are the parameters of the Caretaker Conventions that the MDBA is hiding behind."

Mrs Kirkup added that MI and irrigation communities are fed up with being kept in the dark, asserting that all Australians have a right to know more about the Plan before the election.

"We all need to know the intentions of the Plan and what the sustainable diversion limits are likely to be so we can get an understanding of how the Plan will impact our business, our customers' businesses and the MIA community. Today's announcement by the MDBA of a further delay in release of the Guide will create more uncertainty and fears for our livelihoods will escalate even further. Our communities and all Australians have a right to make their views on this significant issue known to politicians before the election," she said.

Over the past few months, MI has been working very hard behind the scenes to ensure that it is ready to respond in full when the details of the plan are released by the MDBA. MI is implementing a strong response to the planning process and will do everything possible to minimise the negative impacts on MI shareholders, the MIA and the people that live and work in the area.

Mrs Kirkup said what MI would like to see in the Draft Basin Plan is an outcome that balances the needs of irrigation communities with the environment.

"If the decision of the MDBA is on the basis of seeking to ensure this balance, then it would have our support. Unfortunately nothing is further from the truth – what we are witnessing is the politicisation of the Basin Plan process," she said.

Ends - For further information regarding this media release, please contact Matthew Linnegar, General Manager Corporate & Customers, Murrumbidgee Irrigation on 02 6962 0200.