



Media Release

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Feds must step in if NSW tries to pull out of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan

The Federal Government must step in to implement the Murray Darling Basin on time and in full if NSW follows through on its threat to withdraw from the [Murray–Darling Basin Ministerial Council](#). [1]

“The Murray Darling Basin Plan doesn’t just go away because NSW spits the dummy and pulls out of the Ministerial Council,” **said Nature Conservation Council CEO Kate Smolski.**

“Under the legislation, the Commonwealth has the power to step in to ensure the Murray-Darling Basin Plan is implemented on time and in full. NSW Regional Water Minister Niall Blair’s threat last week to withdraw from the council should not derail measures to restore river system to health and give our native wildlife a fighting chance.”

The Senate is due to vote this week to “disallow” measures introduced last year by then-Water Minister Barnaby Joyce to take 70 gigitalitres from the environment and give it to irrigators in the Northern Basin, mostly in northern NSW. Those measures were recommended by Mr Joyce after a flawed Northern Basin Review that was biased in favour of irrigators and dismissed the vast majority of public submissions that supported increasing environmental flows.

“Barnaby Joyce’s decision to return 70 GL for irrigation sacrifices the health of the Darling River and its dependent downstream communities and industries,” **said Inland Rivers Network spokesperson Bev Smiles.**

“The amendment would strip 12 GL water from Macquarie Marshes and 6 GL from the Gwydir Wetlands.

“These environmental gems are listed as wetlands of international significance, but have suffered terribly over the past few decades as water extraction has increased and rainfall has declined thanks to climate change.

“The science undertaken for the Northern Basin Review showed that at least 415 GL needed to be *returned* to the river systems to improve their health. Taking more out will spell disaster for our rivers and wetlands and the unique native wildlife that depends on them for their survival.

“Tony Burke’s Basin Plan had 390 GL for river health in the north, the amendment drops this to 320 GL. It is critical that the Northern Basin amendment is disallowed in the Senate this week for the health of rivers, Aboriginal communities, recreational fishing, tourism and other downstream industries that rely on good river flows.”

[1] The Ministerial Council comprises Ministers from each of the Basin states and the Commonwealth who also chairs the council. Ministerial Council has policy and decision-making roles for matters such as state water shares, and the funding and delivery of natural resource management programs, as set out in the Murray–Darling Basin Agreement.