



MEDIA RELEASE
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Morrison Government Failing the Murray-Darling Basin Plan

The Morrison Government is failing the Basin Plan by shifting money for the environment to the irrigation industry. A report released today by The Australia Institute has exposed that billions of dollars earmarked for the environment is now going to NSW irrigators for bridge upgrades and new fences.

The Federal Government has \$1.48 billion to invest on the public's behalf to return 450 billion litres (GL) of water to improve river health in the Murray-Darling Basin by 2024.

The projects listed for investment of public funds include fencing, upgrading 1,200 bridges on farms and cleaning out irrigation channels – all in NSW.

“Serious questions must be asked about how upgrading 1,200 bridges and building fences for their mates in NSW could return water to the rivers. The situation is absurd.” says Bev Smiles, President of the Inland Rivers Network.

To date the Morrison Government has spent \$68 million on projects that have apparently returned just 2.1 GL of water to the Basin, meaning the water came at an outrageous cost.

Inland Rivers Network is calling on the Federal Government to immediately conduct a full audit of the program and make all of the findings public. Under the Coalition Government, secrecy has been a hallmark of the implementation of the Basin Plan.

Last year an independent review of the plan to return the 450 GL of water to the rivers through efficiency projects found that it was doomed to fail, triggering calls for the Morrison Government to resume open tender buy backs of water from willing sellers.

“This Government are blowing the last chance we have to protect the biggest river system in Australia. The most efficient and cost effective way to return water to rivers is to buy it from willing sellers, and we know there are plenty of willing sellers out there.

“The Morrison Government isn't even pretending to honour the agreements made at the 2012 signing of the Murray Darling Basin Plan. Their disregard for the law, for the rivers of the Basin and the people who live here is staggering.” Says Ms Smiles.

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