

MEDIA RELEASE

Community engagement on SDLAM constraints welcome

06/08/2021

NSWIC welcomes the announcement that the NSW Government will begin consulting with local communities about how to better manage river constraints to improve environmental outcomes and reduce the need to recover more water from Basin communities.

“Constraints management reduces the volume of water entitlements that need to be bought back from irrigators under the Basin Plan by up to 220 billion litres,” said CEO, Claire Miller.

“Just as importantly, it also means the water that has been bought back already for the environment can be better used to achieve Basin Plan outcomes. “

Without constraints management, most environmental water already purchased cannot be delivered to wetland and floodplain targets due to private land blocking the way.

“Working with communities and directly affected landholders is pivotal,” Ms Miller said. “Landholders must be in a position to make informed decisions, and do so voluntarily.”

The Reconnecting River Country Program seeks to address the physical and operational barriers that prevent effective delivery of environmental water. It includes agreement on voluntary flood easements from 3300 landowners.

Constraints management is part of the Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment Mechanism (SDLAM) built into the Basin Plan.

“It is ridiculous it’s taken this long into the Basin Plan’s implementation to start the conversation with landholders, given the CEWH has identified constraints management as more important than more water if the Basin Plan is to achieve its environmental objectives.

“Without constraints management supported by landholders and communities, the environmental water purchased from irrigators with billions of taxpayer dollars spent can’t be delivered to where it needs to go,” said Ms Miller.

“We need to see demonstrable progress on this front as we rapidly approach the looming 2024 deadline when buybacks crazily return to the table if the SDLAM underdelivers.”

NSWIC has a clear position that constraints management cannot be used to facilitate delivery of productive water, as the increased losses from overbank delivery would erode entitlement reliability. “Constraints management must solely be to deliver environmental water and improve environmental outcomes, with environmental water holders bearing the full losses.”