
MEDIA RELEASE

Water Blueprint 2021-22 aims to crack open the allocation blackbox

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Protecting water rights by cracking open the allocation blackbox to identify policy and other drivers eroding the reliability of entitlements is among the top priorities in the NSW Irrigators' Council (NSWIC) latest [Water Blueprint](#) released today.

The Water Blueprint has been shaped by our member organisations in every inland valley of NSW, and several coastal valleys, as well as a broader survey.

“There are some major challenges in protecting water rights of irrigators and having the importance of our sector recognised,” said CEO, Claire Miller, “The Blueprint’s nine priority issues are just the beginning of the mountain our industry must climb to get better outcomes.

Australian irrigators produce more than 90% of Australia’s fruit, nuts and grapes; more than 76% of vegetables; 100% of rice and more than 50% of dairy and sugar.

Thousands of jobs on farms and in service industries and towns depend on the billions of export and local dollars generated from irrigated food and fibre production.

“Our top priority is cracking open the allocation blackbox to identify and address the [policy and other drivers behind eroding reliability of water entitlements for both irrigators and the environment,” said Ms Miller. “Climate change is not the only factor in this mix.”

Before the Millennium Drought, NSW Murray General Security licence holders were allocated, on average, 81% of their licence volume, but this has declined to around 48% (on average). Similarly in the Namoi, General Security reliability has declined from 77% to around 39%.

“It’s a case in point that right now, major dams are full and spilling, many rivers have reached flood levels, Menindee Lakes is expected to soon fill - yet Murray General Security remains on a 30% allocation, it clearly shows there’s a problem with the rules,” Ms Miller said.

“Then there’s the urgent need to amend the Murray-Darling Basin Plan to add flexibility and adaptability to maximise environmental outcomes and remove the lingering threat of water buybacks.

“We cannot stress enough the grave threat to our industry unless change starts now to reshape the Basin Plan as a truly adaptive management framework before we reach 2024.

“Any reform on the scale and ambition of the Basin Plan will inevitably have perverse, unforeseen and unintended impacts emerge over the course of its 12-year implementation.

“But the Basin Plan is too rigid to respond to these issues, a failing well documented in multiple reviews in recent years. If we think these issues are bad now, think of the train wreck coming if governments can’t get this sorted by 2024”.

Other Blueprint priorities include:

- limiting floodplain harvesting to the Cap through licensing and metering;
- making the Government lift its game on the metering reform ‘strollout’,
- prompt implementation of the ACCC recommendations on water market reform;
- addressing deliverability concerns;
- improving understanding of connectivity and implementing improvements to first flush management; and,
- preparing the industry for the impacts of climate change.

The survey results showed good representation across NSW, with 30% of respondents from the Murrumbidgee, 20% from the Murray, and then a relatively even distribution of responses across the various northern, central and coastal valleys.

“We have a lot of work to do, to protect the water security of our farmers and the environment,” Ms Miller said.

The Water Blueprint 2021-22 is available on the NSWIC Website [[HERE](#)].