



National Irrigators' Council

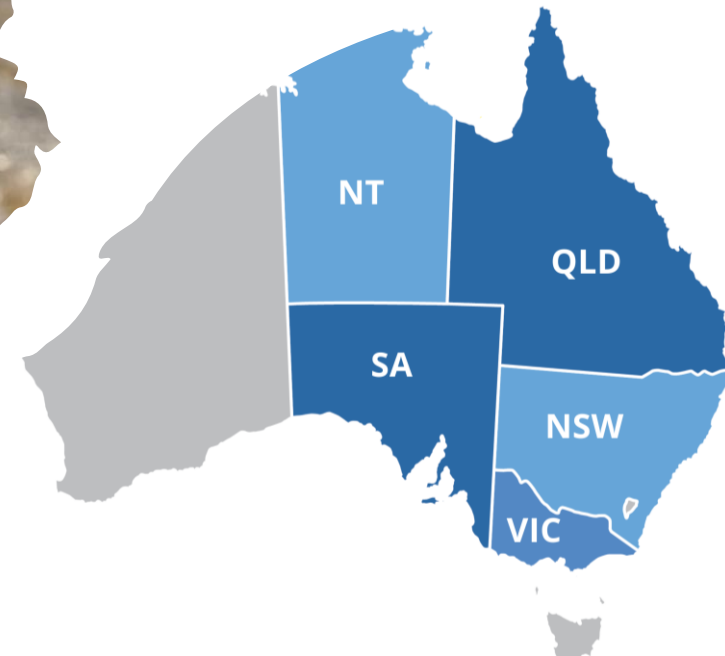
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Australian Almond Conference
Irrigation Industry Perspective
3 October 2024



Overview

- Who we are
- Federal Government and Water
- National Water Initiative evolving into a new National Water Agreement
- The Murray Darling Basin Plan
- Industry stewardship



National Irrigators' Council

- The National Irrigators' Council (NIC) is the voice of irrigators across Australia.
- NIC was created in 2008 to represent the interests of irrigation entitlement holders across Australia.
- We currently have 31 member organizations from across Australia.
- Restructure to be fit for purpose and future proof



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Federal Government

- Ongoing journey
- National Water Initiative 2004 set the foundation
 - aimed to ensure the efficiency of water use and increase productivity, whilst supporting communities and urban needs, and addressing environmental concerns.
- Not fully implemented and gaps identified.
- Further intervention over-time (increased powers)

1994

- COAG
- MDB Cap on extractions

1996

- COAG inc Groundwater

2004

- National Water Initiative

2007

- CTH Water Act
- 1st NWI Assessment

2009

- 2nd NWI Assessment

2011

- NWC Report Card

2012

- CTH Murray Darling Basin Plan

2016

- BP Amendments

2021

- ACCC Water Markets

2023

- RoR Bill and changes to Basin Plan and Water Act

2024

- NWA Principles
- Water Markets Phase 1



New NWI (or NWA)

Why is it important:

- The National Water Initiative (NWI) was signed as an intergovernmental agreement in 2004
- It has been the blueprint of water reform in Australia, underpinning major reforms and legislative changes at state and federal levels.
- The NWI sets the framework for: water entitlements, water sharing plans, water markets, pricing, and much more.
- Will be used as justification for decision-making, and set the agenda, priorities and approaches to the next phase of water management.
- As an intergovernmental agreement, it will have binding effect on signatories.



What do we think?

- Very **rushed** process.
- There are **considerable knowledge gaps**
- There is a **lack of clarity on the binding nature of principles**
- The function of the NWA appears **theoretical and aspirational**, rather than a practical blueprint of clear actions
- The **'living document' risks a lack of certainty**
- The **volume of principles is unnecessary** risks being overly prescriptive on states;
- The numerous **references to international agreements is a call on 'external affairs' powers**, which suggests a change of power being sought by the Commonwealth over the states;
- **Consultation with states has been poor**, with many led to believe this is a simple refresh with no binding consequence (contrary to our experiences previously). The reality is jurisdictions will need to implement this, with no funding commitments, and uncertain compliance regimes;



NWA: Snapshot of NIC Submission

Anticipated

Climate
change

Anticipated

First Nations

Water
property
rights

Risk
assignment
framework

Identified opportunity

Identified risk



NWA - Climate Change

6.5 A **precautionary approach** is taken to allocation for resources with high uncertainty. Adaptive planning cycles will incorporate revision of water plans and planning instruments, and flexible water allocations that are informed by seasonal and inter-annual water availability as future climate conditions occur.



NWA: First Nations

- A recognised gap in the original NWI
- Need to address respectfully
- Concerns Government is taking a divisive approach
- Concerns with draft principles - how will they operate in practice?
 - Challenges integrating Western law and customary laws globally
 - Integration within existing frameworks
 - Proper process would require larger constitutional and institutional reform beyond just water policy



NWA: First Nations

No#	Principle	Mapping to NWI
3.16	Self-determination and Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property are protected and defined in water planning and management processes by ensuring that meaningful consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples occurs early and often and is underpinned by the principles of free, prior and informed consent .	New
3.3	Waters in all their forms are acknowledged to be living entities , which are interconnected with lands and move freely between water landscapes, including upstream, downstream, and between surface and groundwater.	New
4.14	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' knowledge and traditional knowledge systems are brought together with other information and considered an equal part of the evidence base in decision making.	New
1.25	Consideration is given to making unallocated water available for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, which contributes to their access to, management and/or ownership of water for Cultural, spiritual, social, economic and environmental values, in line with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.	New

Murray Darling Basin Plan





Basin Plan - Progress to date

2,075 GL

Sustainable Diversion Limits
in place

- 2,107 GL recovered
- 48 GL of over-recovery in some valleys
- **14 GL shortfall** for local and shared reductions - bridging the gap to be tendered in coming months (QLD and NSW Border Rivers open for tender)
- Net outcome achieved and implemented

2,680 GL

SDLAM – supply measures to
offset 605GL and constraints

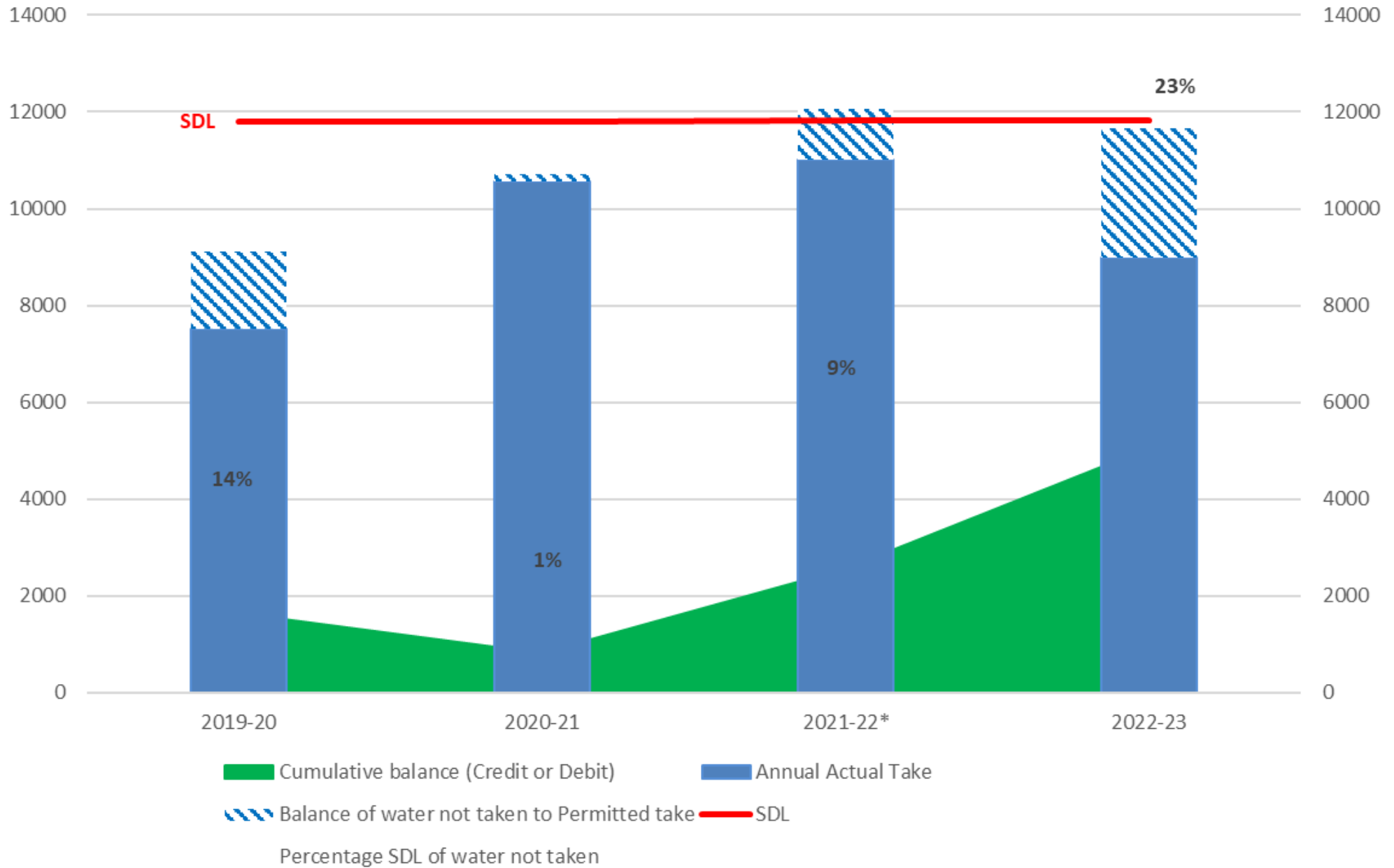
- 13 completed by 2024
- 10 likely by 2026
- 4 partly operable by 2026
- 8 unlikely to be delivered by 2026
- 2 removed
- Supply measures are more likely completed.
- Offset of 290 -415 GL possible
- **Shortfall risk of 190 – 315 GL (remains until 2026)**

Up to 3,130 GL

Efficiency Measures -
additional environmental
water- up to 450 GL

- Linked to SDLAM offset
- 29.86 GL contracted
- **Shortfall 47.4 GL to allow full SDLAM (without extension)**
- Changes to allow rules, direct purchase
- 70GL tender round announced, and two more this year

Sustainable Diversion Limit Outcomes in the Murray Darling Basin



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Alternatives Needed



- Work together
- Offsets recognised
- Alternatives considered
- Fund complementary measures



What are complementary measures

“While recovering water will provide good outcomes, as a sole intervention, it is not enough to deliver the desired environmental benefits... .. recovering water is not enough to deliver all the anticipated environmental benefits. In a highly modified system, equal attention should be given to addressing other threats that water delivery alone cannot ameliorate.”

These authors identify 10 examples of complementary measures, such as:

- Integrated aquatic pest control (such as carp control);
- Addressing cold water pollution;
- Enhancing fish passage;
- Habitat restoration;
- Re-establishing threatened species;
- Integrating complementary measures into Basin-scale flow delivery strategies



Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act) listing

- Proposal to list the whole Murray River downstream of the Darling River (and associated aquatic and floodplain systems) and the Macquarie Marshes, in the 'Endangered or Critically Endangered' category under the EPBC Act.
- Former Labor Government attempted this prior to 2013 election, the day before caretaker period. New Government then disallowed.
- Conservation advice not properly updated since 2013 to include Basin Plan
- The environmental benefits have been questioned as key species already protected under EPBC
- Concerns over complexity and green tape



Basin Plan renewal

- Acknowledge how far we have come
- Make the most of the environmental water we have
- Focus on outcomes
- Acknowledge our existing frameworks
- Accept climate change is uncertain – risk and opportunities





Telling our stories – industry stewardship

- Innovation and sustainability is part of being in business
- Farmers must collectively get better at telling our stories
- Majority of environmental assets on private land

The regeneration of sections of floodplains also involves partnerships with Renmark Paringa Council, the Murray and Riverland Landscape Board, Department of Environment and Water and local landholders.

"... the RIT is the first irrigation settlement in Australia, one of the first to be completely piped, and the first trust to partner with the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder to deliver environmental water, they have long demonstrated the innovation and courage required to be world's best"

Tim Whetstone MP, Member for Chaffey

**Healthy Rivers,
Healthy Communities**



Biodiversity Tours

Coleambally is fortunate to be home to a wide range of important vegetation and native species. As home to some of the unique Australian plants and animals that can't be found anywhere else in the world, Coleambally Irrigation Co-operative Limited (CICL) is committed to helping to protect our local environment.

CICL works closely with the community to improve the security of our biodiversity including initiatives to protect species that have become threatened or endangered.

Flora and fauna that have become endangered elsewhere have developed well in





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