



**The Hon Lisa Neville MP**  
Minister for Police  
Minister for Water



**The Hon Niall Blair**  
Minister for Primary Industries  
Minister for Regional Water  
Minister for Trade and Industry

**10 February 2017**

## **NSW AND VICTORIA PUT BASIN PLAN UNDER THE MICROSCOPE**

NSW Minister for Regional Water, Niall Blair and Victorian Minister for Water, Lisa Neville have established an expert panel to review the offsets mechanism in the Murray Darling Basin Plan. The review will allow NSW and Victorian Governments to make sure the Plan delivers real environmental benefits without short-changing Basin communities.

The panel will provide advice on the technical foundations of the Basin Plan's Sustainable Diversion Limit (SDL) adjustment mechanism. The mechanism allows for the 2,750 GL recovery target in the Basin Plan to be offset by 650 GL through projects that deliver equivalent environmental outcomes with less water. The SDL is the maximum amount of water that can be taken for consumptive use.

There is currently a lack of transparency around the assumptions that sit at the heart of the adjustment mechanism, and Minister Blair and Minister Neville want to ensure these assumptions are realistic and take account of all requirements under the Basin Plan so that a triple bottom line outcome is achieved.

The NSW and Victorian Governments understand the importance of water to the prosperity of our regional communities and remain committed to meeting their obligations under the Basin Plan.

Both Governments support investment in efficient water infrastructure, rather than buying water, and works and measures that achieve environmental outcomes with less water.

The panel will report to Ministers in mid-March and members include:

**Dr Don Blackmore AM** – 40 years of experience in water and natural resources management including a 15 year role as the Chief Executive of the Murray Darling Basin Commission until his retirement in 2004.

**Brett Tucker** – broad range of experience in water resource management and agriculture in a career spanning 25 years. He established Blackwatch Consulting, specialising in the provision of strategy, governance and operations advice to Government agencies.

**Chris Arnott** – has worked across the Murray Darling Basin since 1994 and led the development of the first national snapshot of environmental water in the Australian Environmental Water Management Report 2010. He is also the co-founder of Aither, specialising in establishing, implementing and evaluating effective public policy performance frameworks.

**Professor Peter Davies AM** – aquatic environmental scientist with 35 years' experience in aquatic environmental issues nationwide and internationally. He is also director of Freshwater Systems, an independent aquatic environmental consultancy.



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**Quotes attributable to NSW Minister for Regional Water, Niall Blair:**

*“This issue is above politics. Communities north and south of the Murray River are facing the same challenges. That’s why I am standing with my Victorian colleague to make sure we get the SDL adjustment right.”*

*“To continue to get the best deal possible for NSW under the Basin Plan we need to keep water where it is needed most – in our regional communities, producing the food and fibre of this great state.”*

*“This is a very experienced panel that will provide Governments with an assessment of the adjustment methodology to enable more informed decision making about environmental benefits and ensure operational matters are fully considered.”*

*“I have been very clear that the Basin Plan can be implemented, but not at all costs.”*

*“Models alone do not deliver outcomes and they don’t make the difficult decisions for us – at the end of the day we need a pragmatic, real-world decision and of course this is informed by models.”*

*“Working with Minister Neville in this way ensures NSW is delivering on the Basin Plan in a way that puts communities first.”*

**Quotes attributable to Victorian Minister for Water, Lisa Neville:**

*“I will always stand up to get the best for Victoria and working together will get us the best result. This is about two states putting borders aside and working together to get the best result for the community.”*

*“This expert panel will provide oversight and certainty for communities that the Plan is working in the best interests of farmers and the environment.”*

*“We support the recovery of water through infrastructure investments to reduce leakage and evaporation in our irrigation systems – but we don’t support further water buybacks.”*

*“Striking the right balance between implementing the Basin Plan, supporting local communities and protecting the environment is central to our approach.”*

**MEDIA**

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