



# Rewriting the Murray-Darling Basin Plan

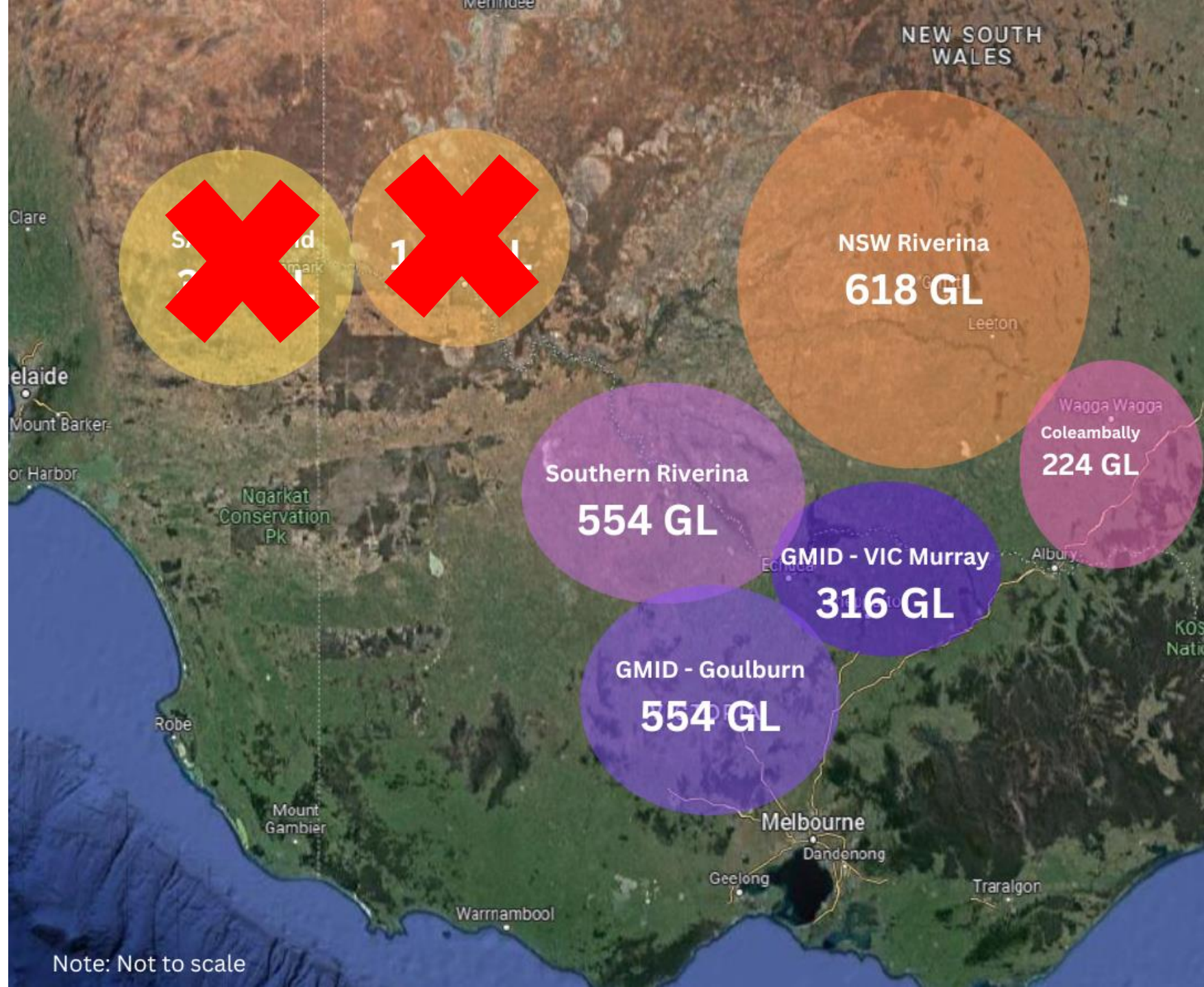
Thursday 28 September 2023

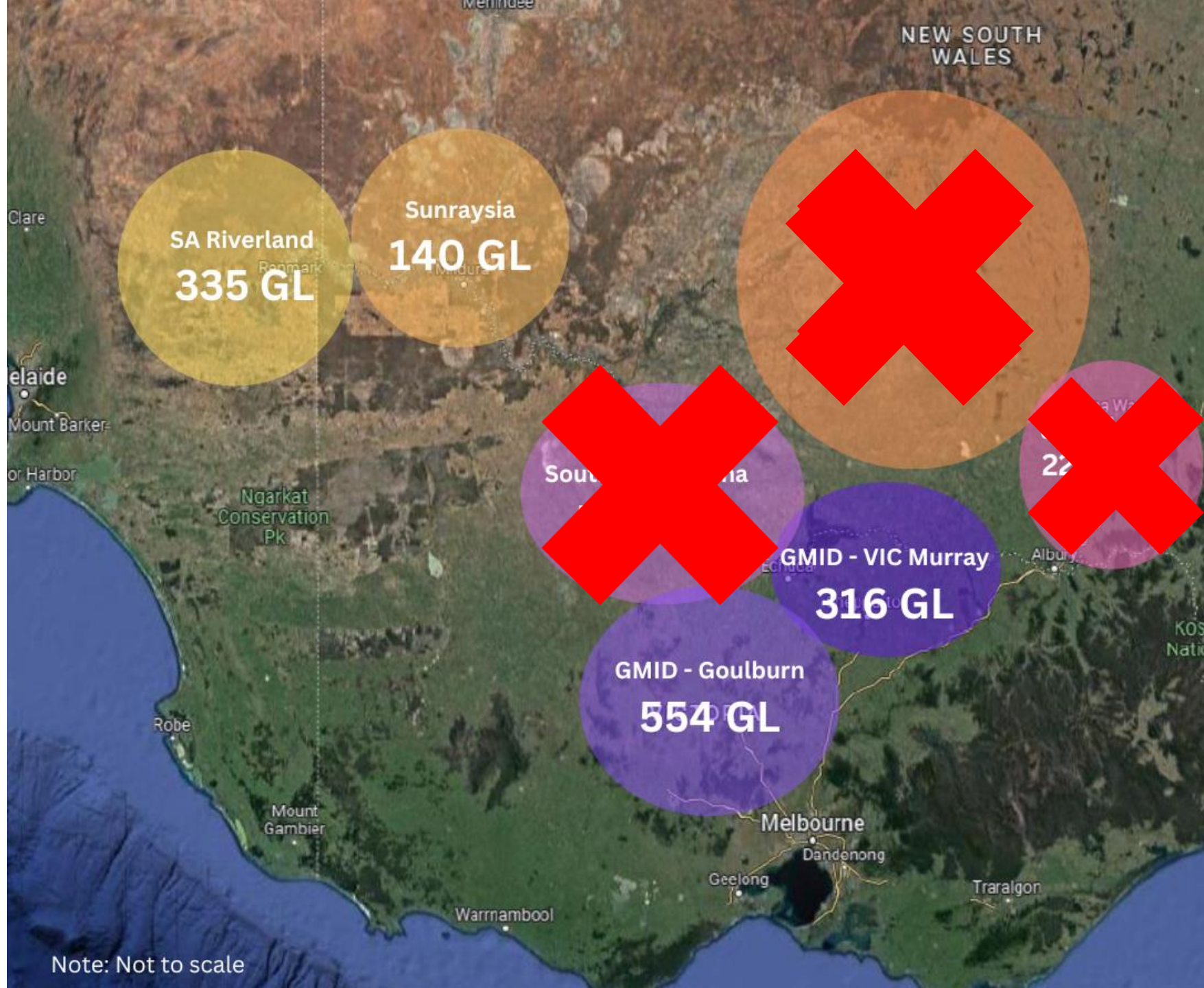
Claire Miller, NSW Irrigators' Council CEO

# The Water Amendment (Restoring Our Rivers) Bill 2023

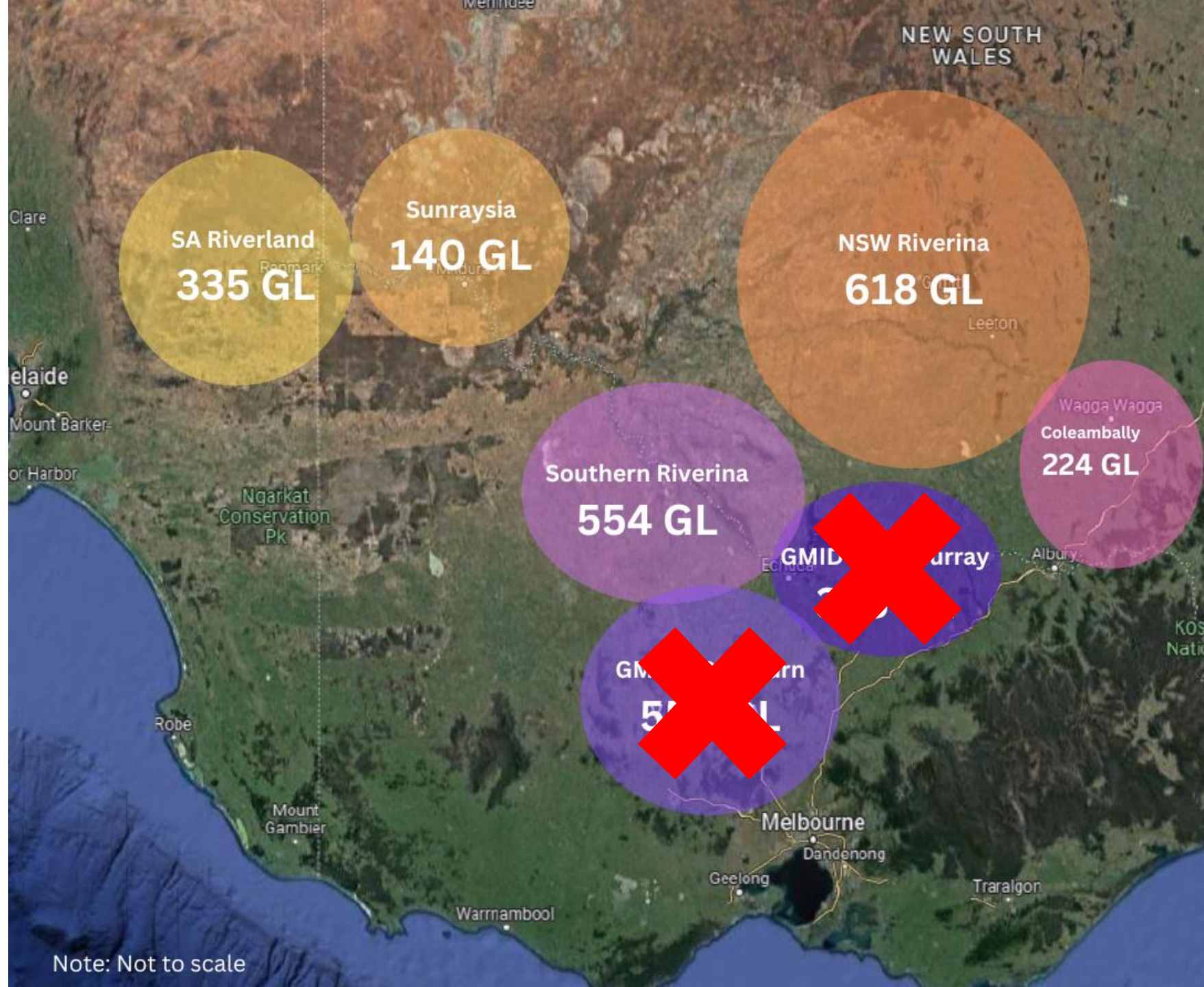
1. The Bill does not deliver **Labor's original 2012 Murray-Darling Basin Plan** "in full"; rather it goes far beyond what was agreed in 2012 with federal bipartisan and all States' support.
2. **Establishes a "free-falling" Sustainable Diversion Limit** by removing all formal processes to set and adjust SDLs.
3. **Is inconsistent with the August Agreement** of Murray-Darling Basin Ministers. NSW not supporting buybacks and Victoria not signing up - leaves unresolved policy, legal and practical questions.
4. **Effectively takes all other options off the table, except buybacks.**
5. **Removes** the previous Labor Government's **conditions** that if any of the extra 450 GL is recovered, it is conditional on only having neutral or improved socio-economic outcomes, and not come from buybacks.
6. **Does not give rivers what they need most now.** Scientists urge a shift to directly target degradation drivers, such as carp, poor water quality, habitat loss, barriers to fish passage, lack of fish screens on pumps, cold water pollution.

**You can't "just add water" to fix these.**





Note: Not to scale



## What happens after the 'willing' sellers, sell?

**3261 FTE jobs lost across small town economies between 2001 – 2016 due to buybacks**

- **648 job losses in southern NSW valleys (21%)**
- **1684 job losses in northern and north-west Victoria (30%)**
- **929 job losses in SA Murray (45%). Job losses were particularly high in the Riverland**
- **2000 jobs lost in northern Basin towns like Dirranbandi, Bourke and Collarenebri**

### **The new Bill:**

**Drop economic output in southern Basin by \$855 million annually and 1500 people out of work.**



Community 'assistance'

# Progress to date – 2975 billion litres

Almost a third of irrigation water is now allocated to the environment.

Diversions for farming, towns and industry now just 28% of total inflows.

Sustainable Diversion Limits in place and being complied with.

Environment is much better able to withstand drought and bounce back

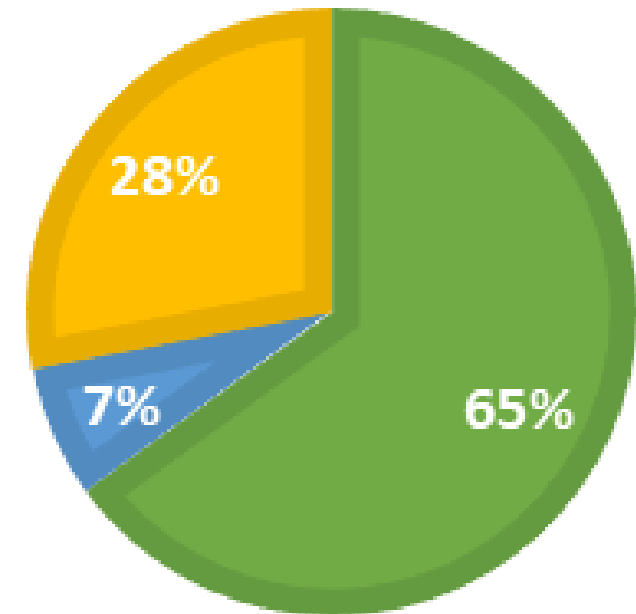
But farmers and communities now less resilient to surviving drought

## TOTAL WATER BALANCE

■ River Water

■ Basin Plan  
Environmental  
Water

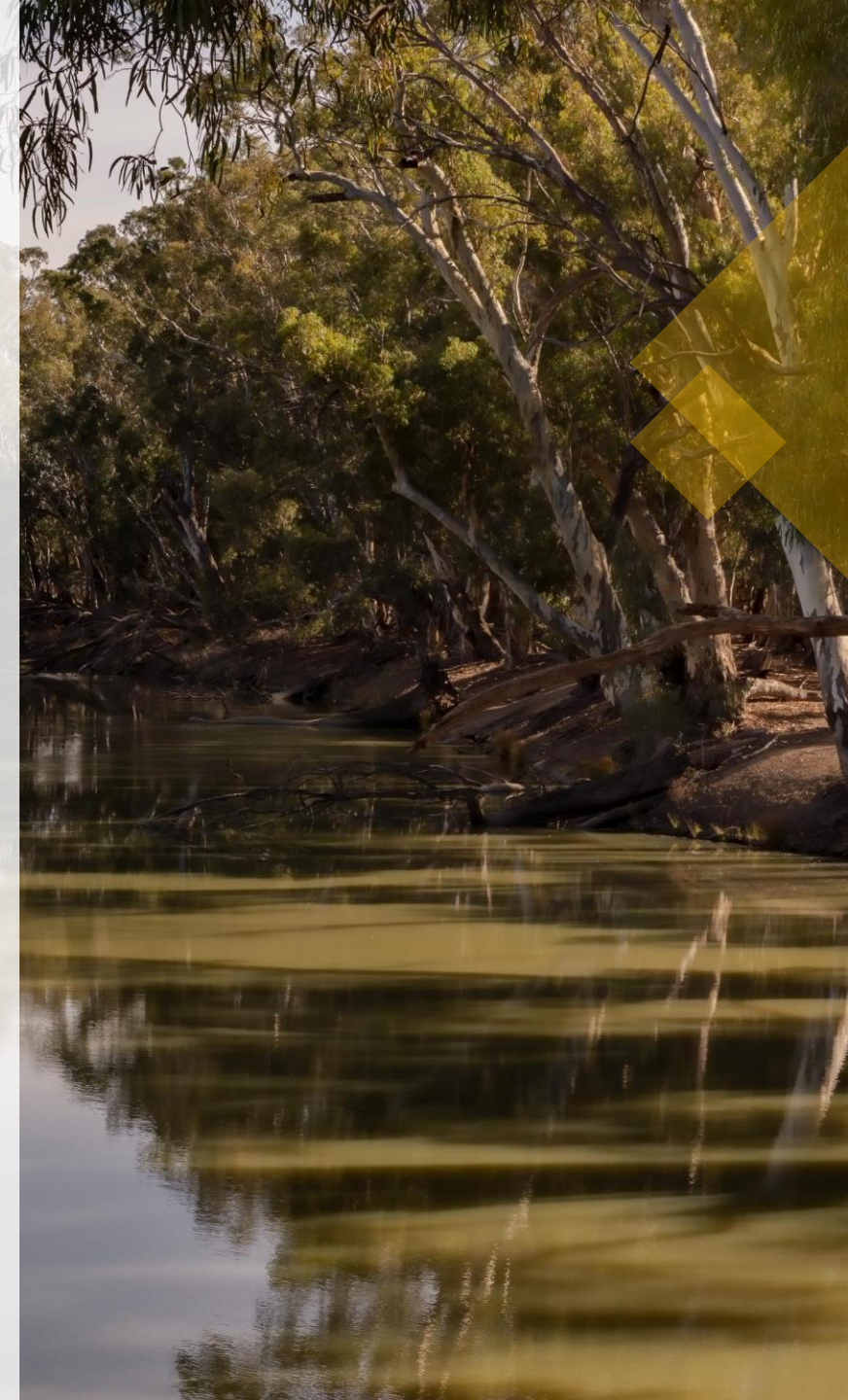
■ Diversions  
(irrigation, town  
water supply,  
other)





# Environmental success

- KPIs in Lower Lakes, Coorong met, even in 2019 drought
- SDLs are already being met
- Basin Plan credited with saving rivers in 2019 drought
- Ecosystems primed to recover as soon as drought broke.
- Improved bird, fish and others' breeding success
- Improving native vegetation condition.
- Environmental water holder partnerships with irrigation companies to get water where it needs to go
- Co-beneficial land and water use: ie. Bitterns in rice



*Any questions?*

