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MEDIA RELEASE

Councils from across the Basin call on all governments to 'stay the course'

Local government is calling on the Government and Opposition to reach agreement over the way forward after a vote in the Senate last night to disallow a key amendment threatens to derail the Murray-Darling Basin Plan.

The Basin Plan was struck a critical blow when the Senate voted 32-30 to disallow the Northern Basin Amendment, which reduced the water recovery target in the Northern Basin from 390GL to 320GL. The vote has caused NSW and Victoria to consider withdrawing from the Plan.

Murray Darling Association National President Cr Thurley said the economic impacts of the Senate's vote would be felt soon and social impacts were immediate, with communities already reporting feelings of disbelief, devastation and uncertainty.

"We urge all governments to reach agreement on a way forward as soon as possible and demonstrate to all Basin communities that they are acting in their best interests," he said.

"There must also be unity against the second disallowance motion, which would make the Basin Plan completely untenable if it passed. Communities must have confidence that the mechanisms in the Plan that provide for adaptive management will be respected."

A disallowance motion against the 605GL of Sustainable Diversion Limit adjustment projects was deferred by the Senate yesterday, with a vote to be held on or before May 8.

Cr David Thurley said in voting against the Northern Basin Amendment, the Senate had compromised the Basin Plan and shown a disappointing lack of regard for process.

"This vote threatens to destabilise the entire Basin Plan," he said. "The Basin Plan was always designed to be adaptive and open to review to incorporate new information. The Basin Plan Amendment was agreed in 2016 on the recommendation of the Ministerial Council following an extensive scientific review process by the Murray-Darling Basin Authority, which also recommended measures to protect environmental water.

"In contrast, the disallowance motion provides minimal additional environmental benefit to the Basin and leaves our communities reeling."

Cr Thurley acknowledged that allegations of water theft had highlighted serious and genuine issues with monitoring and compliance, but said work was already being done to address these matters.

“We demand that this work continues, but these issues should not be conflated with the Basin Plan Amendments,” he said.

MDA CEO Emma Bradbury said the challenge for all Basin governments was to work together in their commitment to a healthy river system and stability for communities.

“We urge all governments to continue discussions to find a way forward and deliver certainty and stability for our communities,” she said.

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For more information, contact MDA CEO Emma Bradbury on 0429 905 017 or Cr David Thurley on 0419 510 274. All Region Chairs are also available for comment.

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