

Murray Irrigation welcomes \$35.1m funding announcement

Murray Irrigation has welcomed a \$35.1 million investment from the Australian Government that will create jobs, have environmental benefit, and demonstrate that water recovery is not the only way to achieve good environmental outcomes under the Basin Plan.

“This is a very welcome announcement,” Murray Irrigation chair Steve Fawns said when commenting on the funding.

“I would like to thank federal Water Minister Keith Pitt, Environment Minister and our local Member for Farrer Susan Ley, and local Nationals Senator Perin Davey. These funds are an important first step for a real win:win outcome where the environment and the community can benefit from the efficient use of environmental water,” Mr Fawns said.

Mr Fawns and other members of the Murray Irrigation Board of Directors have recently had various discussions with Mr Pitt, Ms Ley and Senator Davey which included funding opportunities.

Water Minister Pitt said the investment would create 256 direct and indirect local jobs in construction and seven jobs permanently in operations, as well as providing agricultural and environmental benefits by getting water to new areas and at new times.

“Increasing the capacity of the existing channel escapes will mean environmental water can fill wetlands and creeks that would otherwise only get wet during over bank flows. This is about making our available water work harder and smarter,” Mr Pitt said.

Mr Fawns said part of the funding would connect 130km of the Jimaringle and Cockran Creeks to the Murray system, restoring ecological health to our waterways.

“The funding is a much-needed boost for the Wakool region that has been impacted by past water recovery and holds our most valuable environmental assets. Murray Irrigation has a strong focus on ensuring that local irrigated agriculture is sustainable, along with a healthy environment,” he said.

Mr Fawns added the funding announcement would also enable reconnection of at-risk environmental assets to improve the economic and operational sustainability of Murray Irrigation, which is one of Australia’s largest ‘national interest’ irrigation districts that has been impacted in the past by water buybacks.

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“This project is about environment and agriculture working together and signifies a new era in the intelligent use of water rather than simply recovering more water. I commend the vision of the Coalition Government in announcing this program which will be a significant benefit for the environment and our local community,” Mr Fawns said.

He said this was a long-term vision of Murray Irrigation’s Water Policy Manager Michael Pisasale, who has been rewarded for his concept.

Mr Pitt described the project as one which “demonstrates that water recovery isn’t the only way we can achieve good environmental outcomes, and the Australian Government is open to innovative approaches to improve river and wetland health.

“We put an end to buybacks because of the damage they have done to regions like this – stretching beyond the individual farmgate and impacting on the efficiency of whole irrigation networks,” Mr Pitt said.

Ms Ley said, “increasing the capacity to deliver the larger volumes of environmental water through the network is like adding another 100 users, given the scale of potential water use. This project will help us make water for the environment work just as hard as farmers work their water”.

Senator Davey said with 98 per cent of water recovered, it was time to focus on projects like this that delivered environmental outcomes.

“There’s been so much emphasis on achieving water recovery targets – it’s time we also focused on supporting the CEWH (Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder) to use the available water to best effect,” Senator Davey said.

“In this area, projects like this that enhance Basin Plan outcomes in concert with productive agriculture will see real improvements in the local environment as well as providing downstream benefits. This, combined with our commitment to looking at improving water management efficiency through the Off-farm Efficiency Program show we are committed to delivering the Basin Plan in a way that will help agriculture become a \$100 billion industry by 2030 as well as improving environmental outcomes.

“We committed to putting communities back at the heart of the Basin Plan and projects like these are a clear demonstration of that commitment,” Senator Davey said.

Mr Fawns concluded that the funding showed the Federal Government was “serious about supporting our regional communities” and that these announcements are the “enablers to ensure our region will grow and prosper”.

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Left to Right

Mr Noel Baxter (Murray Irrigation Deputy Chair)

Senator Perin Davey

Sussan Ley Member for Farrer and Minister for Water

Keith Pitt Minister for Water

Mr Steve Fawns (Murray Irrigation Chair)