

Working Together

By Lachlan Marshall

When everyone works together with a commitment to a common goal, it is amazing what can be achieved.

We believe a common goal has been established in implementation of the Murray Darling Basin Plan ie. providing sufficient water to protect our environment, while at the same time ensuring we continue to allocate enough of this precious resource for food production, which is the economic foundation for our regional communities and provides food and fibre needed for domestic and international needs.

At Murray Irrigation, we have clear environmental and productive objectives and we have been working collaboratively with governments and their numerous agencies to build the effective (and at times challenging) balance that we were promised when the Basin Plan was being developed.

As a federal election looms there is political posturing around numerous policy areas, including water and the Basin Plan. Post-election, regardless of who holds power in the 47th Parliament, it is imperative that the collaboration which has been built in recent times is able to continue.

While we respect the Labor Party's position on the Basin Plan and its recently announced five-point plan, it was a little disappointing that there was no discussion or consultation with Murray Irrigation before it was adopted. We are the largest private irrigation company in Australia and have developed a strong environmental focus, including a raft of projects under our Regional Recovery Prospectus that can help deliver sufficient volumes of environmental water, without destroying agriculture and regional communities.

Former Labor Water Ministers, including Tony Burke and Penny Wong, have previously given commitments around consultation, and working with our communities. In 2011, Mr Burke said: "Consultation with communities is important, ongoing and meaningful." And that is so right.



Now, with Basin Plan implementation a decade down the track, it has never been more important. That is why Murray Irrigation encourages current Labor leader Anthony Albanese, his Water Spokesperson Terri Butler and the Shadow Agriculture Minister Julie Collins to visit our region and learn about the developments, the progress and, most importantly, the environmental benefits that can be achieved with the right level of commitment and collaboration.

We want to continue the engagement and solutions-based culture that has been built with organisations like the Murray-Darling Basin Authority, the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder, and state and federal Water Departments, and for this to be achieved politicians from all persuasions need to be part of the process.

It's all about realising environmental objectives, while at the same time protecting rural communities and employment opportunities and allowing our farmers to grow the food required to meet increasing demand – especially in the wake of international crises – which in turn takes the pressure off the supply chain. By increasing the supply of food, we can help ease the cost-of-living burden on everyday Australians.

But the first step, especially for those who have not actively engaged with us in recent times, is to visit our region and learn how far we have come as a food producing community and nation. Our water is metered to the drop to maximise efficiency, our environmental credentials are recognised, and our collaboration to attain local and national environmental goals has a proven record.

However, our stance on water buybacks is unequivocal because no-one wants to again see the social and economic devastation which they have caused in the past. Nor do we need to go down this path.

With the right leadership and direction there is a better way forward, as we have shown, and Murray Irrigation wants to continue working towards a positive environmental and productive future with whoever is in Government.

- **Lachlan Marshall is a Director of Murray Irrigation Ltd, Australia's largest private environmental and irrigation water supplier.**