

**RICE INDUSTRY POSITION:***The Menindee Lakes are a Critical Shared Storage Under the Murray-Darling Basin Agreement*

- We acknowledge the following RWS statement (p. 92): *The Menindee Lakes storage is owned and operated by NSW in accordance with the Murray-Darling Basin Agreement.*
- Menindee is a critical part of the southern Basin’s shared resource. In particular, it has a fundamental role in supporting the reliability of NSW Murray General Security licences.
- Under the *Better Baaka Program*, Menindee Lakes also forms part of a NSW Government commitment to off-set environmental water recovery under the Murray-Darling Basin Plan.
- The *Better Baaka Program* should not place an unfair water recovery burden on irrigators in the NSW Murray and Murrumbidgee. We will not support this outcome.
- Licence-holders in the NSW Murray and Murrumbidgee must receive targeted consultation on any options under this RWS that propose the following:
  - changes to the operation of Menindee Lakes under the *Murray-Darling Basin Agreement*; and
  - deviation from the original ‘off-set’ promise made by the NSW Government under the Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment Mechanism (SDLAM).

*Rice Industry Non-Negotiables*

- Murray and Murrumbidgee General Security licence-holders expect their property right to be protected, and restored where it has already borne disproportionate risk.
- We refuse to accept any negative change in allocation reliability resulting from any of the options being pursued under this RWS.
- We don’t support RWS options that change *Water Sharing Plan* content to take water off one user and give it to another. Options like this must be removed from the RWS altogether.
- The NSW allocation framework must be urgently modernised so the rice industry can fully optimise its legal access when water is available.

*Rice Industry Position on the Murray-Darling Basin Plan and SDLAM Projects*

- General Security licence-holders expect their property rights to be protected. There should be no negative change in allocation reliability arising from either the Basin Plan or this RWS.
- We don’t support the *Reconnecting River Country: Landholder Negotiation Framework* in its current form. The Framework shouldn’t be the default NSW approach to lifting constraints.
- We don’t support buy-backs, and the proposed recovery of an additional 450 GL of environmental water should not take place if there’s any socio-economic impact.
- Many SDLAM projects won’t be completed by 2024. More time is needed, including to amend projects so they can achieve the best outcomes possible under the Basin Plan.
- Even with more time, if there’s still a risk of additional water recovery from the consumptive pool, Governments must supplement existing and amended projects with new projects.
- For example, complementary measures and better up-to-date modelling could significantly improve environmental outcomes if they were included in the SDLAM process.
- Through the Basin Officials Committee (BOC), Governments should fully explore their powers under s7.15(2)(b)<sup>1</sup> of the Basin Plan to ensure this can happen.

*Going Forward*

- We agree with commentary in the Lachlan RWS ‘What We Heard’ Document that all draft options should undergo a *Reliability Impact Assessment*.
- We recommend that this also be supported by full-costings that clearly articulate the likely future price impact for **all** impacted licence-holders.
- State-wide, the NSW approach to RWS roll-out has significantly eroded stakeholder trust. A better, more comprehensive engagement strategy is urgently needed.

<sup>1</sup> 7.15(2)(b) In this section, **applicable method** means, if the Authority and the Basin Officials Committee agree to use another method – that method. [Basin Plan 2012 \(legislation.gov.au\)](https://www.legislation.gov.au/australian-legal-system/basin-plan-2012)