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Government water reform process fatally flawed

Citrus Australia has made strong representations in its submissions to the Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) and two federal government inquiries into the proposed Murray Darling basin plan.

A new process that will fully develop a triple bottom line outcome and which engages all Basin communities and governments is urgently required, Chief Executive Officer Judith Damiani said.

"Not only do we need to give immediate attention to the serious social and economic impacts, but also identify environmental works and measures and fast-track irrigation infrastructure upgrades"

"The proposed Basin plan also needs to consider the extensive natural resource; catchment management; and other landcare programs, rather than just relying on increased water flows from irrigators for the total environmental solution."

This may mean amending the *Water Act* to ensure a balanced outcome" said Ms Damiani.

Citrus Australia remains concerned at the lack of clarity and planning behind the Commonwealth's current irrigation water purchase program; and has urged that the Commonwealth increase its scrutiny of proposed foreign purchases of Australian agricultural land and water similar to the approach used for media and residential real estate.

"The whole process to date has created a high level of uncertainty and anxiety, and this has only heightened with the impending resignation of the MDBA Chair," she said.

"On top of this the Productivity Commission has recently released its draft report on rural research and development, recommending slashing Commonwealth contributions by 50%. How can we be expected to provide sustainable food production in a changing climate with less water, with increased global competition from low-cost countries, in the face of these flawed government policies?" asked Ms Damiani.

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www.citrusaustralia.com.au *Citrus Australia Ltd is the national peak body for citrus growers. Citrus Australia represents the industry in policy and advocacy, biosecurity, market access, development and promotion, research, and communications. The citrus industry in Australia is worth \$540 million and represents the interests of around 2000 citrus growers. Approximately 80% of the industry is located in the Murray Darling Basin. It is the largest fresh fruit exporter, with annual export earnings of around \$190 million.*