

25 May 2018

Committee Secretary  
Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislative Committee  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600  
email: [rrat.sen@aph.gov.au](mailto:rrat.sen@aph.gov.au)



Dear Secretariat

The National Farmers' Federation (NFF) is pleased to provide a submission to the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislative Committee.

The NFF is the peak representative body for the agricultural sector. The NFF's membership comprises all of Australia's major agricultural commodities across the supply chain. On water matters NFF is 100% focussed on farmer outcomes.

The NFF recognises that the Murray Darling Basin Plan (Plan) is a compromise plan that was negotiated to meet the needs of a diverse set of stakeholders in the complex environment that is the Murray-Darling Basin. The Plan does not meet the needs of any one group, stakeholder, valley or community. It necessarily has positives and negatives for each actor. It is in this context that NFF promotes the view that the Plan is the Plan and must be sensibly implemented.

The Water Amendment Bill 2018 (Bill) seeks to provide a mechanism which will allow the previously disallowed regulation that would provide a 70 GL reduction in the northern basin environmental allocation to be implemented by ministerial order.

Consistent with NFF's statements above, the 70 GL provision is a key part of the Plan and should thus be implemented. To address identified deficiencies in the scientific understanding of the Northern Basin, the development of the 70 GL reduction was done through an independent consultative process and recommended to the government by the independent Murray Darling Basin Authority acting within the parameters of the Act and Plan legislation.

The Bill provides a significant failsafe to ensure there are limits to the scope where a Minister can act unilaterally to direct the Authority to prepare an amendment under the plan. The Bill provides appropriate limitations on and in what circumstances the Minister can act and appropriate time limits on how quickly the Minister needs to act, specifically only in the case of a disallowed or deemed disallowed motion. NFF regards this as appropriate, consistent with the intent of the Act, consistent with the implementation of the Plan and necessary to assure particularly northern basin communities of certainty from a measured approach to environmental and consumptive water allocations.

The NFF supports the passage of the Bill.

Yours sincerely,

**TONY MAHAR**  
**Chief Executive Officer**