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## **Water plan process flawed**

The NSW Farmers' Association says farmers and regional communities appear to have been effectively shut out of the discussion about the Murray Darling Basin Plan, with potentially devastating results.

NSW Farmers' Association President Charles Armstrong says the rush to complete a draft plan to the Government's deadline means critical input from the farm sector is missing.

"Yes, they've done some preliminary consultation, but there has been no opportunity for detailed technical analysis of social, economic and structural factors.

"All indications are that the Basin Planning process to date appears to have been driven almost entirely from an environmental perspective," he said.

"The Murray Darling Basin is the most significant agricultural production area in Australia, representing over 40% of the country's total agricultural production.

"The Water Act 2007 stipulates that the Basin Plan must deliver social, economic and environmental outcomes, but, as far as the Association is aware, almost no socioeconomic studies have been conducted within the basin, only four months out from the release of the draft Basin Plan.

"A Basin Plan based solely on environmental requirements has the potential to jeopardise food security for the nation, destroy rural communities, and undermine the basic 'triple bottom line' sustainability principles widely accepted by sustainability experts across the globe."

Mr Armstrong says a shift away from agriculture will be very hard to reverse and this could have untold repercussions on Australia's ability to feed not only its own population, but the increasing food and fibre demands of the world.

"All basin water users require a healthy river system, but agriculture in the Murray Darling Basin is simply too important to rush a plan through just to tick off an election promise.

"The Association is calling for the draft plan to be deferred until such time as the requirements of the 2007 Water Act can be adequately met," Mr Armstrong concluded.

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