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Feds making all the right noises on Basin plan balance

The Federal Government is making all the right noises regarding Murray Darling Basin guide reforms, but still needs to convince Citrus Australia it's genuine about preserving irrigation communities, Chief Executive Officer Judith Damiani said.

Citrus Australia attended last week's roundtable with the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, Tony Bourke. Also at the roundtable were Simon Crean, Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government, and Senator Joe Ludwig, Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

A surprise visit to the meeting by Prime Minister Julia Gillard, was "the ultimate sign" that the government was serious about addressing the balance, as she stressed the need for continued consultation during the reform process, Ms Damiani said.

Ms Gillard stated that reform process required a focus on healthy rivers, food production and regional communities, adding the Guide was only the start of the process and several current socio-economic inquiries would be important. She also mentioned the importance of infrastructure upgrades.

"So all the messages are right. We remain to be convinced, though, until the final reforms are on the table," she said.

The National Farmers Federation and the National Irrigators Council were keen to point out that communities suffering drought are still very raw and the release of the Guide had not helped.

"They also raised concerns about timeframes now that new socio-economic studies have been commissioned, and the need to focus on infrastructure efficiencies and environmental works and measures to close the gap," Ms Damiani said.

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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.