



The Hon. Tony Abbott MHR
Leader of the Opposition

29 November 2012

Mr Andrew Gregson
Chief Executive Officer
NSW Irrigators' Council
PO Box R1437
ROYAL EXCHANGE NSW 1225

Dear Mr Gregson

I am writing to you in response to concerns you have raised regarding the Government's recently released Murray Darling Basin Plan.

The Coalition started this process and we hope that our constructive approach will help deliver a positive outcome for all Basin stakeholders. The Coalition has always been committed to supporting a balanced Murray Darling Basin Plan.

The Government has now tabled the Plan which I confirm the Coalition will support.

However, the Coalition recognises that there are parts of the Plan that can be improved to achieve a more balanced outcome. Therefore, the Coalition will make a commitment in relation to its implementation and in addition, has moved amendments to the *Water Amendment (Water for the Environment Special Account) Bill 2012*.

The Coalition makes this commitment to provide further certainty to the 2.1 million Australians living in the Basin. As the amendments did not receive the support of the House, I confirm that a future Coalition Government will seek to move these amendments as a priority.

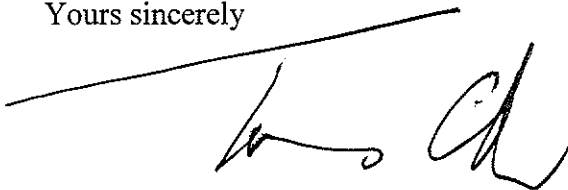
Firstly, the Coalition moved amendments to the *Water Amendment (Water for the Environment Special Account) Bill 2012*. These amendments would have legislated the commitments already made by the Government. Importantly, these amendments would have ensured that the funds appropriated by this legislation were expended on on-farm infrastructure works and not used for buybacks. As part of this package of amendments, the Coalition moved to cap the total amount of buybacks at 1500 GL.

In addition, the Coalition's amendments would have required that actions to remove constraints and those needed to achieve the potential 450GL recovered under this Account would satisfy a neutral or improved socio-economic test. Furthermore, the social and economic impacts of potential constraint removals would be considered as part of the development of the constraints management strategy.

To ensure consistency across broader water policy, if elected, the Coalition will amend the Water Recovery Strategy to apply a cap on buybacks of 1500GL. Unfortunately, changes to the Water Recovery Strategy can only be made by the Government of the day as it is not contained in legislation and thus outside the Parliament. This in no way undermines our commitment to meet the requirement for the Plan to deliver an additional 2750GL of environment flows. However, we guarantee that the Coalition will work with the states to deliver on the infrastructure and environmental works and measures targets that have been set by the existing Water Recovery Strategy to deliver the required water above 1500GL.

I trust that these further assurances highlight the Coalition's commitment to delivering a triple bottom line approach to the Murray Darling Basin Plan.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tony Abbott', is written over a long horizontal line that extends from the left margin towards the center of the page.

TONY ABBOTT