

## **IRRIGATORS CALL OUT CANDIDATES ON FALSE STATEMENTS**

NSW Irrigators Council (NSWIC) Chairman, Richard Stott, has branded criticism of former NSW Water Minister, Katrina Hodgkinson, by Ron Pike - a candidate for the Upper House in this week's State Election - as blatantly untrue. Mr Stott said Mr Pike's comments falsely misrepresent the efforts of the Minister in working with irrigators on softening the impact of the Murray Darling Basin Plan on irrigation communities in NSW. This follows a statement by Mr Pike on Sydney radio 2GB last week that the Minister "had never spoken to irrigators."

Mr Stott said while NSWIC is apolitical and works with whichever party is in Government, Mr Pike's comments demanded a response from the irrigators' peak body.

"We know that during Election campaigns there will be robust language used by candidates, but the statement made by Ron Pike was so blatantly untrue, and because he purports to represent the view of the broader irrigation community of NSW, we must set the record straight. Mr Pike is entitled to express his opinion of the Minister - that's part of our robust democratic system - but to claim that the Minister had never met irrigators was complete nonsense! The truth is that Minister Hodgkinson often met irrigators and worked closely with NSWIC on water issues and in trying to moderate the impact of the Murray Darling Basin Plan.

Mr Stott said that Minister Hodgkinson held out against the Plan for 12 months longer than Victoria and South Australia and did not sign the Inter-Government Agreement until the Commonwealth gave written assurances on aspects of the Plan that would otherwise have disadvantaged NSW irrigators, and she was publicly thanked for her efforts by NSWIC.

"It is wrong to blatantly misrepresent the truth for political gain by blaming State Government Ministers for legislation that was introduced by the Commonwealth, not the State, and the record needs to be set straight. NSW has never had the power to scrap the Murray Darling Basin Plan. Irrigators and NSWIC were opposed to the Plan, but once it became law in the Federal Parliament we had to reluctantly accept it as a reality, and we continue to work with Federal and State Governments to minimise its impact on irrigators and regional communities. For some political candidates to lay the blame for the Plan on Minister Hodgkinson and to peddle false hope that the Plan can be overturned is wrong, and NSWIC is calling them out on it," Mr Stott said.

"Minister Hodgkinson also worked very closely with irrigators in developing and finalising the Floodplain Harvesting Policy, and laid the groundwork for the licencing of supplementary licenses in perpetuity, both representing significant gains for irrigators."

Minister Hodgkinson's efforts to consult irrigators and delivery policy initiatives, has been continued by her successor Minister Humphries" Mr Stott concluded.

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For further information:

Richard Stott  
Mark McKenzie, CEO

Mobile: 0412 552 682  
Mobile: 0412 075 245

Approved: RS/MM