

IRRIGATORS URGE COAG ENERGY COUNCIL TO WORK ON ELECTRICITY PRICE RELIEF

(18 August 2016)

Ahead of tomorrow's COAG Energy Council meeting in Canberra, the NSW Irrigators' Council and Cotton Australia have called on the State and Federal Energy Ministers to act on their commitment to provide low-cost and reliable energy to consumer and industry.

NSW Irrigators' Council Policy Manager Stefanie Schulte said the communiqué from the last COAG Energy Council meeting in December clearly stated that energy costs must come down. It is now up to the State and Federal Energy Ministers to translate this in to a real and tangible outcome that lowers power prices.

"We have waited far too long for action on exorbitant electricity costs. We expect that this COAG Energy Council will deliver a clear direction and strategy on how we can achieve a sustainable low cost energy future for all Australian businesses including our irrigators and growers," Ms Schulte says.

"Despite a short term price relief in 2015, the NSW network businesses are still in court contesting the last regulatory determination made by the Australian Energy Regulator. Unfortunately, there is still every chance that we will see future prices increases in the next few years."

"We need a new approach to energy regulation that truly places the consumer at the heart of the decision making process. Future investment, business confidence and growth of the irrigation sector depends on it."

Cotton Australia Policy Officer Felicity Muller says "irrigators and growers have gone to extraordinary lengths to mitigate the rise in electricity costs and has actively looked for opportunities to drive down costs, increase efficiency, diversify the industries' energy mix and incorporate new technologies. It is time that the regulatory framework catches up."

"Energy is essential to irrigated agriculture and growers and irrigators often cannot amend their energy use profile, due to crop watering requirements, despite their escalating costs. This makes us an extremely vulnerable customer group - impacting productivity and financial viability of the irrigation industry."

"Growers and irrigators are actively looking for ways to minimise their use of the electricity grid because the tariffs and charges associated with grid connection do not suit our needs and are often unaffordable. This is a clear failure of previous Government cost regulation policy."

"While the State and Federal Energy Ministers will be debating the transition of Australia's energy market and the modernisation of the current regulatory framework, NSW consumers are stuck in the 'here and now' with high energy costs and the prospect of even higher electricity charges," Ms Schulte says

"It is time that we see some leadership from the COAG Energy Council that will bring lasting price relief to energy consumers and give irrigators and growers a voice in the energy debate".

ENDS.

Approved: MM/TN

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