

NSW IRRIGATORS WELCOME SENATE REPORT (18 March 2016)

NSW Irrigators Council has welcomed the release of the Report and Recommendations of the Senate Select Committee Inquiry Into The Murray Darling Basin Plan.

Council CEO, Mark McKenzie, said the Report of over 200 pages and 31 far reaching recommendations has covered off on all the key issues raised with the Committee over the course of its Inquiry into the Basin Plan, and highlighted the need for the Government to pay heed to the areas of the Plan and its implementation that need urgent revision - particularly on the social and economic impacts on Basin communities from the recovery of water for the environment.

Mr McKenzie said that the Council is working through the full report and its findings, but NSWIC can immediately recommend Government adoption of many of the Inquiry recommendations because they directly accord with Council policies - including:

- The amendment of the Water Act 2007 to make clear the equal standing of the economic, social and environmental needs and outcomes (Recommendation 25).
- No further buybacks of water to occur and that action to recover the additional 450GL of water through efficiency measures is delayed until the Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment Mechanism target (of 650GL) is met and the socio-economic impacts of the water recovery to date are known (Recommendation 21).
- The Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) undertake and publish a thorough assessment of the estimated and actual social and economic impacts of the implementation of the Plan, including through the pursuit of the remaining water recovery in already distressed areas (Recommendation 2).
- The MDBA address the existing over recovery in the Macquarie and other terminal valleys such as the Gwydir Valley, with a view to limiting recovery to amounts which address valley specific environmental needs (Recommendation 3).

- The Commonwealth assume liability for damage to private property from environmental watering events, including to landholders and third parties, other than those who have given consent to flooding (Recommendation 6), and the MDBA and State Governments address the issue of third party impacts from environmental watering during the development of constraints proposals, and clearly communicate with landholders likely to be affected by watering events (Recommendation 7).
- The MDBA, Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder (CEWH) and Basin States conduct greater monitoring, objective evaluation and communication of environmental watering activities (Recommendation 26), and the Government fund the expansion of the CEWH'S Long Term Intervention Monitoring Projects to include more sites in the Basin to provide greater monitoring and evaluation of environmental watering (Recommendation 27).
- The MDBA review its communication methods, particularly in regard to projects still in development such as constraints proposals, and improve the incorporation of community and landholder views into Authority decisions and reports (Recommendation 8).

Mr McKenzie said NSWIC would be seeking an early response from the Government on the Inquiry recommendations.

"We want to know where both the Coalition and Labor sit on implementing the key Inquiry recommendations before the Federal Election is called. It is very clear that not enough attention has been taken of the huge negative economic impacts of water buybacks in some districts - now very clearly apparent. We need the major parties to agree to a halt in further purchases of water until all the social, economic and environmental impacts of water recovery and environmental watering have been thoroughly evaluated. That means the recovery of the additional 450GL of so called 'up-water' needs to be shelved until all the impacts of the water recovered under the 2750GL Basin Plan proper are known. "

ENDS

Approved: MM/TG

For Further Information:

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