

WATER MINISTERS MUST AGREE A MORE FLEXIBLE APPROACH TO BASIN PLAN PROJECTS

(21 April 2016)

NSW Irrigators Council has urged the Ministerial Council of Murray Darling Basin State and Federal Water Ministers to use this Friday's crucial Council meeting to agree a more flexible approach to adopting projects to recover water for the environment and achieve better environmental outcomes under the Basin Plan.

Council CEO, Mark McKenzie, said there are two absolutely critical decisions that the Ministers must agree at Friday's meeting. These are the need to extend the time period that States can advise the Commonwealth of their proposed water management and infrastructure projects to offset the need for water purchases; and the inclusion of non-flow related environmental projects such as the release of the carp herpes virus and engineering measures to reduce cold water pollution from dams - both of which could have a marked effect on the recovery of native fish populations.

"We need to have sufficient time for all potential projects to be advised to the Federal Government and reviewed against the environmental gains they make - not just the flows they create. The worst outcome would be to drop the gate on consideration of any further projects at June 30 - because that is the hard and fast date the Basin Plan stipulates. Nor do we want the likely calling of an early Federal Election leaving the Commonwealth in caretaker mode and the Ministerial Council unable to extend the project notification and assessment timetable to allow the best possible list of environmental projects."

"NSWIC strongly supports the position taken by NSW Water Minister, Niall Blair, that the Basin Governments and the Commonwealth need to shift their focus to achieving the best environmental outcomes; not just on securing a prescribed volume of water. We cannot achieve the best outcomes for Basin communities or the environment if we close the door early on allowing good projects to be fully considered. NSW Irrigators are absolutely in sync with Minister Blair's call for an extension of the time allowed for Basin Governments to lodge flow and non-flow related water saving projects into 2017, and we urge all the Water Ministers to support that call," Mr McKenzie said.

ENDS.

Approved: PD / TG

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