

FEDERAL OPPOSITION RISK TRASHING THE BASIN PLAN

(17 February 2017)

NSW Irrigators Council (NSWIC) is urging the Federal Opposition to rethink its position on how the Murray Darling Basin Plan is to be finally implemented – stating that the proposed amendments foreshadowed this week by Opposition Environment and Water spokesman, Tony Burke, could wreck any chance of delivering the Plan outcomes.

NSWIC CEO, Mark McKenzie, said rather than strengthening the Plan and delivering more water to South Australia, it was far more likely that threatening to trash the 650,000 megalitres (ML) of Sustainable Diversion Limit offsets in the Plan unless a further 450,000 ML of additional water for the environment is purchased from irrigators, would blow the Plan up instead!

“The Opposition’s position is really not helping South Australia – if that is their intention. If they continue to push for the purchase of the 450,000 ML of additional water recovery as absolutely non-negotiable it is almost certain that the upstream States will walk away from implementing the rest of the Basin Plan because the Labor amendments would fundamentally alter what was agreed by the States in 2012. That would be a spectacular ‘own goal’ for South Australia.”

“As Water Minister at the time of the Basin Plan being enacted Tony Burke is well aware of the detail of the Plan, which says that the additional 450,000 ML of special environmental account water (known as the ‘up water’) cannot be recovered if it has negative social and economic impacts in the Basin – not just on irrigators but also on their communities! There has already been significant economic damage to regional communities in the Basin and NSWIC believes more water cannot be recovered without causing even deeper damage to regional economies”, Mr McKenzie said.

NSWIC supports finding other ways of delivering the Plan’s environmental outcomes through a range of alternative measures, currently being assessed by NSW, Victoria and the Commonwealth, that could include unlocking water reserves, introducing more flexible management arrangements for the Murray, and introducing a suite of complementary measures that do not wholly rely on additional flows. These complementary measures would deliver enormous environmental benefits through eliminating feral carp, aiding native fish breeding and movement through the river systems, and better wetland vegetation management.

Mr McKenzie said that NSWIC fully supported the NSW Water Minister, Niall Blair, who has responded to Mr Burke’s statements – indicating that NSW would review its support for the Plan if the proposed amendments were to proceed.

ENDS.

For further information:

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