

## **IRRIGATORS PUSH BACK AGAINST MORE FARM WATER RECOVERY (08/02/2018)**

The NSW Irrigators Council (NSWIC) says the report by consultants EY into how Murray Darling Basin water efficiency programs could be implemented to recover an extra 450 gigalitres (GL) of water for the environment proves that far too little is known about the current or future economic and social impacts on irrigators and their communities for the Commonwealth to push on with any new on-farm efficiency programs.

NSWIC Chairman, Richard Stott, said the EY Report had presented a very conditional set of recommendations that are highly ambitious and with little margin for error. He said that there was not enough data available to properly assess the impacts of the water already recovered, let alone the likely negative impacts of a large additional volume of water being taken out of regional communities and out of the water market.

“The Federal Government cannot have any level of confidence that new water recovery programs are not going to seriously deepen the economic and social damage that has already been identified through research across the Basin. This includes research by the Murray Darling Basin Authority which clearly shows that the recovery to date has had serious economic impacts on irrigation reliant communities. Many of these communities and the irrigation industries on which they rely are at or very near to tipping point already, so it is an incredible leap of faith for the EY Report to state that the recovery of an additional 450GL is feasible without negative impacts.”

“We note that the EY Report did not give an unequivocal recommendation that further water could be recovered from irrigators without more economic damage being caused, and it advised Government to conduct much more research on the impacts. Our response is more decisive. We are restating our position that ‘enough is enough’ – there must not be any more water taken out of agriculture!”

Mr Stott said the EY Report also did not focus on long term impacts such as the further reduction in water available to irrigators to purchase on the temporary water market, and the increase in temporary water prices as demand increases for a more limited pool of water available for agriculture.

“The shortening of available water for annual lease will have a very negative impact on the water market into the future, and this will hurt the large numbers of irrigators who now rely on buying in water to run their businesses. The legislation says that the 450GL can only be recovered if the impacts are neutral or positive – but the likely economic impacts detailed in the EY Report have such a large outcome range (from - \$300 million to +\$600 million) that it would be foolhardy for the Federal Government to proceed with new on-farm efficiency programs. The Government needs to focus on solutions to water recovery off-farm instead.” Mr Stott said. ENDS.

For further information:

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Approved RS / TN