

Wednesday 4th January, 2012

Fair Shake of the Sauce Bottle

The closure of the Heinz's Girgarre tomato sauce factory with the loss of 146 jobs is a sign of what will come if the Government adopts the Murray Darling Basin (MDB) Draft Plan.

The CEO of the National Irrigators' Council (NIC), Tom Chesson said without a strong, viable, internationally competitive food processing sector many communities in the MDB will be forced to close down and farmers would go broke.

"It is a disgrace that a country where even a Prime Minister has demanded a 'fair shake of the sauce bottle' and where a bottle of tomato sauce can be found in just about any Australian home that we only have one company manufacturing tomato sauce left in Australia.

"Whilst water reforms are not the reason for the closure of the Heinz's Girgarre tomato sauce factory, to put it simply if we don't grow the food or fibre, the food manufacturing sector, which is the country largest, will have nothing to process and jobs will disappear.

"The Australian Food and Grocery Council have already warned the Australian Government that by 2020 up to 130,000 jobs will be lost from the sector, many of them in the MBD.

"The NIC said it was willing to stand shoulder to shoulder with the Prime Minister to help her full-fill her pledge to make 2012 the year of the job, however, if she is serious she will have to ask her Water Minister to send the draft MDBA Basin Plan back to the drawing board.

The CEO of the NIC, Tom in its current form the Draft Basin Plan is a job destroyer.

"We agree with the Prime Minister when she stated in Wollongong on the 13th of September, 2011; ... nothing matters more than bringing the dignity and benefits of employment to all who want to work."

"We want to work. We want to pay our way. We want to keep exporting food and fibre – not jobs.

"We want a Basin Plan which equally takes into account environmental, social and economic issues," he said.

Mr Chesson said he hoped the Prime Minister may find the time in her busy schedule to come to irrigation dependent communities such as Girgarre to explain how her Governments' Draft Basin Plan will deliver 'jobs, growth and fairness'.

"Irrigation communities provide real jobs and we say 'yes to jobs, to growth, to fairness' but if the current Draft Basin Plan is adopted many of our communities have no future," Mr Chesson said.

"It would be a sad day if Australia could no longer manufacture its' own tomato sauce," Mr Chesson said.

Media Contact: Tom Chesson 0418 415597