

18 August 2026

Water policy must be on the food security menu

Australia's food security strategy cannot ignore water as a critical input, according to irrigation industry leaders in Canberra attending the National Farmers' Federation Summit today.

Agriculture Minister Julie Collins promoted her food security strategy at the Summit, which also heard from the Canadian High Commissioner about their approach to the issue.

National Irrigators' Council, NSW Irrigators' Council, Ricegrowers' Association, Citrus Australia and Cotton Australia were united in their call that water policy belongs in Australia's food security conversation.

NSWIC Chief Executive Officer, Dr Madeleine Hartley said we need to stop treating healthy rivers and a productive agricultural sector as competing policy objects and start designing policy around both.

"If food security is a national priority, then protecting Australia's capacity to produce food must be part of every major water policy decision. Water policy is food policy. Australia needs to start treating it that way."

"Canada gets something right that Australia is still missing – being a food exporter doesn't mean you can take your domestic productive capacity for granted," Dr Hartley said.

Perin Davey, Executive Director of the Ricegrower's Association, said food security is not just about access.

"Too often we just think about whether we can access fresh food, but we know that we must also think about whether we can produce our own fresh food.

"When it comes to rice, in a good year we can produce enough domestically to feed 50 million people world-wide. But if we get the policy settings wrong, that Australian rice disappears from the supermarket shelves very quickly.

"You can't ask Australian farmers to maintain high productivity while simultaneously making long-term decisions that reduce their access to the water they need to produce it", Ms Davey said.

Zara Lowien from the National Irrigators' Council said, "the Government is currently consulting on Australia's first National Food Security Strategy. It should be asking a simple question: is our water policy leaving Australia capable of producing food in the future?

"With current global insecurity, the Australian Government can make the decision to reduce uncertainty for farmers and set stable water policy settings that do not reduce water for farming and optimise the use of environmental water governments now hold"

"Enough is enough, the evidence suggest we need to do more than just add water to achieve sustainability."

Media contacts:

- **Zara Lowien is available for national media interviews on 0427 521 399.**
- **Dr Madeleine Hartley is available NSW media interviews. Please contact Anthea Gregory on 0493 968 631.**

