

Tuesday, 3 August 2010

## Time for parties to stand up on water policy

The National Irrigators' Council has called on the major political parties to outline their policies for irrigators and rural communities as the election campaign reaches its half way point.

NIC CEO Danny O'Brien said neither side of politics had yet given any indication that they have a clear plan to allow irrigators to continue producing food and fibre for this nation, in balance with the needs of the environment.

Mr O'Brien said the NIC welcomed the Labor announcement today of the development of a National Food Plan but it was curious that it did not mention water.

"A significant amount of Australia's agricultural production relies on irrigation – you simply have to have water to produce food. Irrigation produces 34 per cent of the gross value of agricultural production from just 0.5 per cent of agricultural land.

"The Labor announcement talks about 'risks to the long-term sustainability of food production' – well without water, our farms won't be very sustainable. Water must be a significant part of any National Food Plan."

Mr O'Brien called on both sides of politics to outline how they will ensure that we maintain a productive farming base while addressing environmental sustainability.

"We are concerned that debate on water in recent years has placed very little emphasis on the needs of rural communities, jobs, food and fibre production and family farms.

"With the Murray Darling Basin Plan having been put off until after the election and today's announcement not mentioning water, it appears that the politicians don't want to talk about water for food and fibre.

"It's time we saw those parties vying to form the next government of this country give us an understanding of how they see the future of irrigation and food production across the nation, not just in the MDB."

Mr O'Brien said the NIC had asked all parties to make a number of commitments, including:

- Committing to existing funding programs for water reform, particularly in infrastructure efficiency programs
- A Productivity Commission review of the draft Murray Darling Basin Plan to independently consider social and economic impacts
- Scientific assessment and measurement of environmental watering programs and the transparent reporting of that assessment
- Support for communities that suffer through reduced water availability
- Further funding for water-use efficiency programs outside the Murray-Darling Basin.

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