

Thursday, 4 August 2011

Desal deal reinforces city-country double standard

The \$228 million deal to fund the expansion of Adelaide's desalination plant and reports Canberra won't be affected by the Murray Darling Basin Plan yet again expose the double-standard that applies to urban and rural communities when it comes to water reform, the National Irrigators' Council said today.

Under an agreement between the Commonwealth and South Australian Government's, Commonwealth taxpayers will hand over \$228 million in return for a measly six gigalitre entitlement for the River Murray and a little more allocation in "favourable years".

"That's \$38,000 per megalitre," said NIC CEO Danny O'Brien, noting that the most expensive irrigation infrastructure project was about \$10,000 per megalitre.

"Talk about a double standard. The Commonwealth constantly tells us that irrigation projects have to be financially competitive yet it goes off and funds this project at four times the cost.

"Meanwhile the six GL return is equivalent to about 4.6 per cent of Adelaide's entitlement, a stark contrast to the reductions of between 30 and 50 per cent that would apply to SA irrigators and those across the basin based on the numbers in the Guide to the proposed Basin Plan.

"This morning we have the ACT Minister [expressing confidence](#) that Canberra won't make a contribution either – and may even get increased water.

"So irrigators are being asked to do the heavy lifting while our cities make no or little contribution to the River Murray's health - and gets bucketloads of cash and an alternative water supply in return.

"Where are the green groups squealing about Adelaide and Canberra's 'cosy deal' or their over-reliance on the river?"

Mr O'Brien said the NIC acknowledged that critical human water needs had to be delivered before agriculture got its share and did not begrudge the Commonwealth funding for desalination.

"It's just that this deal barely makes a contribution to the environment and is certainly not competitive with investment in irrigation water-use efficiency.

"We're sick of being told by Adelaide politicians that irrigation water must be reduced while they and their constituents continue to suck from a giant straw that goes over the hills into the Murray.

"What's good for the goose is good for the gander. If irrigation is to be drastically reduced to 'save the Murray' we don't see why cities with alternative supply options such as desalination, recycling and stormwater use can't be treated the same."

Media Contact: Danny O'Brien (02) 6273 3637 or 0438 130 445