

Thursday, 7 April 2011

## Irrigators call for fairness on interception activities

Irrigators from across the country have called on governments to treat all water users fairly in water planning decisions and deliver on commitments made on interception activities in the National Water Initiative.

The National Irrigators' Council has adopted a policy position that all water use, including interception activities such as farm dams, forestry plantations and stock and domestic supplies, should be measured, licensed and require a water access entitlement.

NIC members have also demanded that any government-imposed reductions in water availability should be applied equally to all water use, including interception, not just to users such as irrigators accessing water through river diversions.

NIC CEO Danny O'Brien said it was a fundamental imperative that all water use be treated equally.

"Irrigators are firmly of the view that all water use should be accounted for and adhere to the principle that if you can't measure it, you can't manage it. That's why we believe all use should be brought into the entitlements system, as even minor use can add up.

"The Guide to the proposed Murray Darling Basin Plan suggested significant cuts to water availability, but expected those cuts would not apply to interception activities such as farm dams and plantations. That means a heavy burden is being asked of irrigators, who are expected to pay for the growth of these other activities while those water users get off scott-free. That's simply not acceptable."

At its recent policy meeting NIC also endorsed a range of positions including that:

- NIC does not seek to delay the proposed Basin Plan, but we reject the need to deliver "certainty" at any cost – time should be taken to deliver a balanced Basin Plan;
- The Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder should clarify its intentions about trading its entitlements and work to minimise its impact on the market when trading allocation;
- NIC supports the establishment of nationally consistent rules that require water intermediaries (brokers) to maintain trust accounts and professional indemnity insurance;
- Governments and the MDBA should be monitoring and assessing the recovery of the environment following good rain to help inform future environmental watering plans; and
- New environmental water entitlements achieved through savings projects should not be created unless savings have been fully verified and audited and modelling confirms no-third party impact on existing entitlement holders.

Mr O'Brien said the creation of new environmental entitlements had to be considered carefully.

"It is ironic that, in trying to address so-called over-allocation, governments are intent on creating more entitlements. This has to be done so as not to impact on existing entitlement holders."

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