

Tuesday, 7 December, 2010

Resignation of MDBA Chair Mike Taylor

The National Irrigators' Council said the resignation of Murray Darling Basin Authority Chair, Mike Taylor, provides an opportunity for the Federal Government to fully address widespread community concern about the proposed Basin Plan and its capacity to consider social and economic impacts.

NIC CEO Danny O'Brien said irrigators had always been concerned that the *Water Act 2007* placed too much emphasis on the environment and did not allow adequate consideration of the impacts on people, communities and food and fibre production.

"A bad Basin Plan, such as the one outlined in the recent Guide, will cost thousands of jobs, force up food prices and threaten family farms and regional communities.

"We have always said that the Act is unbalanced and needs amending and the new advice that Mr Taylor refers to confirms that view. His resignation provides an opportunity for a circuit-breaker – the Government now needs to step in, take control of the process and clearly articulate how it will deliver a balanced Plan.

"It has also become clear following the release of the Guide that the 'science' cannot be relied on to give a clear answer on what should be done. If we are to get a sensible outcome then this will have to be a judgement call made by politicians, not a technical decision by an un-elected bureaucracy which admits that its science comes with only a medium level of confidence."

Mr O'Brien said a number of things now needed to occur:

- The MDBA must publicly release its new legal advice on the *Water Act 2007*.
- The Government must respond to this advice and Mr Taylor's parting words with a clear indication of how it will deliver the triple-bottom-line outcome it has promised and whether or not it agrees the Act needs amending to do so.
- The parliamentary Regional Australia Committee inquiry must provide advice to Government on how to deliver a plan that provides balance, including possible amendments to the Act.

Mr O'Brien said the Government should focus its attention on environmental works and measures and other water efficiency projects to deliver a win-win outcome.

"If the process continues on its current trajectory it will fail. The MDBA and Government have already lost significant trust in Basin communities and we will need strong action from Minister Burke to rebuild that trust."

Mr O'Brien said Mr Taylor had always been clear about his concerns surrounding the task he was given and irrigators respected him for his frank advice and concern for rural communities.

"Mike Taylor took on a thankless task and pursued it with gusto and for that he deserves credit. He has also taken a principled decision to step down knowing he cannot deliver a balanced Basin Plan under the current arrangements. We wish him all the best for the future."

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