

4 December 2008

Irrigators Welcome Passage of Water Bill

The National Irrigators' Council has welcomed the passage of the *Water Amendment Bill 2008* through the Commonwealth Parliament subsequent to all Basin States passing referral legislation.

Council Acting CEO Andrew Gregson says that whilst the Bill is imperfect, irrigators wanted it passed so that focus could be directed to the Basin Plan.

"The Basin Plan is where the detail affecting irrigators and the communities that rely on them will be contained. Each day of delay in the passage of this legislation was a day less that we have for preparation of the Basin Plan.

The Council has reiterated its message about stakeholder engagement in preparing the Plan.

"The Plan must be broad reaching – environmental sustainability is vitally important, but social and economic factors must have equally serious consideration. Irrigators, Basin communities and Australians in general must have the opportunity to weigh these interests to decide the future that we want for ourselves and our export partners."

Mr Gregson acknowledged that the Bill was imperfect, noting that Council had raised three issues in particular.

"Irrigators believe that the definition of Critical Human Needs is far too wide, there should have been an annual extraction limit placed on South Australian carry over and climate change should not have been precluded from being new knowledge. Despite these imperfections, timely passage of the Bill was more important for us."

Council acknowledged the efforts of Nationals Senators to correct these imperfections.

Council also noted the alignment of rural peak bodies through the course of this matter.

"The National Irrigators' Council has worked closely with the NSW Irrigators Council and the NFF to ensure progress of this Bill. We also acknowledge the efforts of the VFF in their state."