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## SA FUNDS WELCOME – NOW WHERE’S THE REST?

The National Irrigators’ Council has welcomed the announcement of \$110 million in funding for irrigation infrastructure in South Australia, but says it only highlights how slow the roll-out of infrastructure funding has been across the country.

NIC Chief Executive Officer, Danny O’Brien, said irrigators were frustrated that projects to make water efficiency gains across the country had been so slow to develop and water should be high on the agenda of today’s COAG meeting in Brisbane.

“It is now 522 days since COAG signed the Intergovernmental Agreement on Murray Darling Basin Reform and the Commonwealth committed \$3.7 billion to state priority projects yet this is the first of the significant projects to actually get moving,” Mr O’Brien said.

“We are very concerned that there has been too much focus on buying back entitlements and not enough on getting infrastructure investment hitting the ground.

“Investment in irrigation infrastructure is a win-win – it helps improve and modernise irrigation systems and farms while achieving water savings both for farmers and the environment. This sort of outcome is critical if water reform is to be a success in this country.

“Frankly the states have been about as fast as a three-toed sloth in getting their projects up and running.

“We understand that Queensland has a business case lodged with the Commonwealth but that major projects in Victoria and NSW will not be lodged until February and June respectively.

“That will mean a lag of more than two years between the initial IGA and when funding is even finalised, let alone before equipment starts hitting the dirt. It’s not good enough.

“Irrigators have a tough enough time of it at the moment without facing even greater delays caused by lumbering state governments. It’s also incumbent on the Commonwealth to crack the whip and get these programs moving.”

While most SA irrigation systems are already highly efficient and finding savings will not be easy, Mr O’Brien encouraged private operators and irrigators in South Australia to look closely at the \$110 million program on offer.

“There is an here to upgrade irrigation delivery systems with government support but irrigators should look carefully at the guidelines to ensure this program suits the needs of their businesses.”

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