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600 days and still nothing to show

Today marks 600 days since the signing of an agreement between the Commonwealth and Murray Darling Basin states that committed \$3.7 billion to irrigation infrastructure - and there's barely anything to show for it.

The National Irrigators' Council said irrigators had just about run out of patience with both the Commonwealth and state governments over the interminable delays.

NIC CEO Danny O'Brien said the 600 day wait was an indictment on governments given the Commonwealth had spent more than \$1.2 billion on buying water from irrigators in the same time.

"Irrigators have generally been supportive of reform on the understanding there would be investment in irrigation infrastructure that would help them maintain productivity in a future with less water. Doing more with less has been the government's mantra.

"The fact it is taking so long to get works happening on the ground is very frustrating and is leading many irrigators to question government commitments to infrastructure projects."

Mr O'Brien said the NIC understood the only projects that had been completed were various pipelines around the Lower Lakes in SA - mostly involving no efficiency savings - and some pilot projects in NSW.

"We've been patiently waiting, negotiating with governments on guidelines and preparing applications, but our patience is wearing thin. If reforms in the Murray Darling Basin are to be successful then investment in irrigation efficiency must be a key part of them.

"While the states have been tardy in providing business cases to the Commonwealth for their state priority projects, the Commonwealth is hardly doing any better with the programs it is running.

"The \$300 million southern basin on-farm project was announced in last year's Budget, but delivery partners have not yet even been announced, while funding for private infrastructure operators in NSW is progressing at a similar snail's pace.

"Irrigators understand that these detailed proposals take some time to plan and consider, but 600 days is getting ridiculous, particularly if you compare it to how quickly the government was able to roll out stimulus spending on infrastructure as part of its response to the global financial crisis.

"Irrigation communities have been suffering through a drought crisis for over 10 years and these infrastructure works will stimulate their economies through investment now, and continuing productivity gains into the future.

"It's time to get the ball rolling on infrastructure efficiencies that will deliver water to the environment and leave a legacy of improved efficiency for irrigators and their communities."

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