

Friday, 18 February 2011

Burke making progress on Basin commitments

The National Irrigators' Council said the Commonwealth has taken a good step in delivering on its promise of balanced water reform with tax changes and other initiatives announced today.

NIC CEO, Danny O'Brien, said Water Minister Tony Burke was making progress with the announcement of changes that will help limit the impact of Murray Darling Basin reform on food and fibre producers and regional communities.

"A bad Basin Plan will cost thousands of jobs, force up food prices and threaten the viability of family farms and regional communities.

"We need to get smarter about this reform process to reduce the social and economic impacts of returning water to the environment.

"We're pleased that Mr Burke has recognised that with his announcements today. He has clearly been listening to the views of irrigators and communities and has started to take the appropriate action."

Mr Burke today announced:

- Changes to tax laws to cut red tape and maximise Government investments in irrigation infrastructure
- A new rolling tender approach to water buybacks to reduce the impact of the Government's involvement in the market and provide more flexibility for irrigators wanting to sell
- A special forum with State Ministers in April that will focus on improving environmental watering efficiency through works and measures projects

Mr O'Brien said the initiatives give irrigators some confidence that the Government is genuine in its intent to deliver a balanced Basin Plan.

"We look forward to seeing the detail on proposed changes to tax arrangements to ensure they do alleviate concerns of our members and maximise investment on the ground.

"We need to see better integration between the buyback and infrastructure programs to reduce impacts on communities and remaining irrigators.

"The Ministers' focus on working with the states on environmental works and measures is critical and we hope to see commitments to efficiency projects like this to deliver better outcomes for the environment without devastating irrigation communities."

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