

Friday, 15 January 2010

## IRRIGATORS UNCONVINCED ON ABBOTT'S BASIN PLAN

The National Irrigator's Council said today it did not support a full Commonwealth takeover of responsibility for the Murray Darling Basin because there was no evidence that shifting management from one group of politicians and bureaucrats to another would improve the operation of the system.

NIC CEO Danny O'Brien, said management was only a small part of the problems afflicting the Murray Darling Basin. He was responding to the position of the Leader of the Opposition that a Coalition Government would hold a referendum on a Commonwealth takeover of the Basin if the States did not refer powers.

"There seems to be some Canberra politicians under the misapprehension that they can make it rain whereas politicians in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Adelaide can't. Because that is the real problem in the Basin at the moment – 10 or more years of the worst drought in recorded history.

"No changes in management will address the fact that there has simply not been enough water to go around in recent years."

Mr O'Brien said the NIC passed the following resolution only in November:

*That the NIC supports Commonwealth involvement in overall planning for water resources in the Murray Darling Basin but does not support a complete takeover of water management by the Commonwealth Government.*

"The States have already referred some powers to the Commonwealth and the Murray Darling Basin Authority is engaged in the development of a Basin Plan that will set new sustainable diversion limits that all Basin states will have to comply with.

"That Basin Plan will set the rules for the next decade and beyond. Irrigators are already grappling with these changes and the myriad other reforms underway in water and they would not appreciate a change in direction – a direction that we thought had bipartisan support."

Mr O'Brien said it was disappointing that the Opposition had not consulted with irrigator groups before announcing its plan.

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