

Tuesday, 13 July 2010

Basin Plan must be released before election

The National Irrigators' Council has called on the Murray Darling Basin Authority to release the guide to the proposed Basin Plan as soon as possible to relieve the uncertainty that is building in basin communities.

Meeting in Renmark today, the NIC passed a resolution calling on the Authority and the Government to ensure the guide to the Plan is released before the forthcoming Federal Election.

"Irrigators and their communities are nervous about the content of the Basin Plan and the new sustainable diversion limits (SDLs) but they are equally sick of the speculation and uncertainty that is now building," said NIC CEO Danny O'Brien.

"Our members want to see the guide released as soon as possible so that they know what is proposed and how much, if any, water they are likely to lose, and that we can begin the debate about the proposed Plan.

"At the moment we are all fumbling about in the dark and the uncertainty is getting worse now that the initial deadline for the release of the Plan has passed.

"Irrigators would be very concerned if the guide to the Plan was not released before the election. This is a significant policy change and in the interests of transparency, all Australians have the right to know what is proposed before they cast their ballot."

Mr O'Brien said the consultation process will continue after the election ensuring there will be plenty of time for reasonable discussion and debate.

"But it is only fair that voters have the chance to speak to candidates and political parties to hear their views on the Plan.

"From our perspective we remain concerned to ensure that the Basin Plan adequately balances the needs of the environment with the interests of irrigators, food production and rural communities. This can't be a one-way process – it must be balanced," Mr O'Brien said.

The NIC has spent the past two days in the South Australian Riverland, undertaking a tour of local farms and environmental sites yesterday, before holding its meeting in Renmark today.

Delegates from around the country, including all Basin states, took part in the tour and meeting.

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