

Friday, 10 July 2011

Senate sees the light on Water Act problems

Irrigators have welcomed acknowledgement by a Senate committee that the *Water Act 2007* is fundamentally flawed and needs amendment.

The National Irrigators' Council said the report of the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs committee highlights the lack of balance in the Act and calls on the Government to release all legal advice relating to the Act including that provided to the Murray Darling Basin Authority.

"NIC has long made known its concerns about the *Water Act 2007*," said NIC CEO Danny O'Brien.

"In our view, the Act is biased to the needs of the environment given its reliance on the external affairs powers to achieve a head of power under the Constitution. The external affairs powers focus almost exclusively on delivering the needs of the environment in order to meet our international treaty obligations – and that means people, communities and food and fibre production are an afterthought.

"We're pleased the Committee has agreed with us and we now look forward to the Government's response, although early indications and dissenting reports suggest we shouldn't get our hopes up.

"We acknowledge assurances from Water Minister Tony Burke and MDBA Chair Craig Knowles that they can deliver a balanced Basin Plan within the confines of the current Act. We hope they can deliver because the worst outcome would be the delivery of a balanced Basin Plan that is ultimately torpedoed in the courts because it is inconsistent with the Act as it currently stands."

Mr O'Brien said Senator Barnaby Joyce deserved great credit for pushing for this inquiry despite political opposition from all sides of Parliament, including some on his own.

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