

Friday, 19 March 2010

Irrigators hail on-farm funds as a win-win

The National Irrigators' Council has welcomed the long-awaited announcement of the first round of funding for the Commonwealth Government's \$300 million On-Farm Irrigation Efficiency Program.

Minister for Water, Penny Wong, today announced the first \$100 million worth of projects, comprising six delivery partners and 556 projects on farm in the southern Murray Darling Basin and Lachlan catchments.

NIC CEO, Danny O'Brien, said the announcement was a welcome step that would help deliver water for the environment, efficiency savings for irrigators and a legacy of more efficiency irrigation systems.

"We have always said that investment in more efficient irrigation infrastructure is a win-win for the environment, for governments, for irrigators and for irrigation communities.

"We are very pleased that this announcement has now been made and irrigators can get on with the job of getting works done on farm," said Mr O'Brien, who joined the Minister at the announcement of the funding in Deniliquin.

Mr O'Brien said irrigators were in the best position to decide what sort of upgrades would best suit their businesses and the projects would include investments in more efficient spray and drip systems, improved farm layouts for flood irrigation, soil moisture monitoring equipment and on-farm storage and re-use systems.

The National Irrigators' Council has long been lobbying for the roll-out of infrastructure funds and met with Minister Wong as recently as this week to raise concerns about delays.

"We want to see more investment in efficient irrigation systems like that announced today and less focus on the buyback of irrigation entitlements. Each has their place as part of the reform process, but efficiency investments provide a much bigger bang for the buck in regional communities and will allow irrigators to continue producing the food and fibre that all Australians rely on.

"It's important to understand that every megalitre saved for the environment through infrastructure investment or purchased from willing sellers will help reduce the impact on irrigators of anticipated reductions in water availability under new Sustainable Diversion Limits that will be part of the Murray Darling Basin Plan.

"We look forward to the Government making more announcements as soon as possible on other projects that will be funded under the Government's \$5.8 billion Sustainable Rural Water Use and Infrastructure program."

Mr O'Brien said the NIC would continue to work with the government on the efficient implementation of the program, including on behalf of those applicants that have missed out in this round of funding.

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