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Major parties abandon SA irrigators on water rights

The major parties have turned their backs on South Australian irrigators in the lead-up to the election this weekend according to the National Irrigators' Council (NIC).

With just five days to go before polling day, neither the Liberal nor Labor parties have provided any commitment that they will recognise irrigator rights and legislate to provide compensation in the event irrigators lose access to water.

Working on behalf of its South Australian members, the NIC wrote to the leaders of the Liberal, Labor, Nationals and Greens parties seeking commitments to introduce compensation arrangements for both River Murray and groundwater irrigators should they have entitlements cut by any government decision. So far, only the Nationals have responded positively.

NIC CEO, Danny O'Brien, said unlike some other states, South Australia has no compensation provisions in its water law, meaning irrigators are at the mercy of government decisions.

"This is a critical issue at the moment with the prospect of cuts to the reliability of River Murray entitlements under the forthcoming Murray Darling Basin Plan. It is also an issue for groundwater users when the time comes to review Water Allocation Plans, with some irrigators currently facing a 43 per cent cut to water availability with no compensation.

"How many other businesses would put up with such a dramatic slashing of a major input by government decision with no compensation?" Mr O'Brien said.

"We are pleased that SA Nationals Leader, Karlene Maywald, has given a commitment to fair and equitable compensation for River Murray irrigators but it seems the other parties, including the Greens, are not interested in irrigators' rights.

"There has been a lot of focus on water in this election campaign but very little of it has been on the needs of irrigators – those people that provide the food that South Australia relies on and generate hundreds of millions of dollars in exports and economic activity.

"The major parties now have only a few days left to show that they do care about irrigators' rights," Mr O'Brien said.

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