

Friday, 27 May 2011

Progress on MDB infrastructure remains hard to see

The National Irrigators' Council is pleased that today's Ministerial Council meeting Adelaide has made progress on Murray Darling Basin reform but remains frustrated at the slow pace of infrastructure roll-out.

NIC CEO Danny O'Brien said funding for feasibility studies on environmental works and measures was a positive step in the right direction and recognition that a uniform start date of 2019 was needed was a good thing.

"However it's getting a bit repetitive to hear Ministers talk about the need to get funding for infrastructure projects rolling without seeing any real action.

"Today's communiqué says that Ministers expressed 'frustration' at the pace of implementation of infrastructure projects. Well Ministers, we're frustrated too. We don't understand why officials have been tasked to 'report back by the end of June' on a new process when these same issues were raised at the meeting on April 1.

"What has the bureaucracy done in the last seven weeks? It is very difficult for those of us outside these Ministerial meetings to see what progress there has been on infrastructure.

"Ministers and their bureaucracies are now on notice that they must start delivering substantial infrastructure projects – many of which have already passed due diligence – before the draft Basin Plan is released or irrigators will see this as a breach of faith in the reform process.

"Infrastructure investment is a win-win for the environment and basin communities. It is just common sense, it's agreed by all governments, now let's get on with it."

Mr O'Brien said irrigators were pleased to see commitments to environmental works and measures and commended Ministers for getting this funding happening.

"We've long argued that projects that deliver environmental outcomes with less water are part of the solution. Finally governments are listening to us and starting to pay serious attention to them.

"On this front, credit is due to Minister Burke for stumping up funds to get more work happening."

Mr O'Brien said it was NIC policy that all states should begin implementation of the Basin Plan in 2019 and with Ministers now on board, that should be agreed by the Murray Darling Basin Authority.

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