

Friday 4th May, 2012

Irrigators the Key to Australia Becoming a Global Food Superpower

The National Irrigators' Council (NIC) today welcomed the Prime Minister's comments that she believed Australia could be a food producing superpower, however they cautioned there will have to be a fundamental shift in government policies if agricultural and food production is to fully benefit from the Asian century.

The NIC CEO, Tom Chesson said NIC has [previously](#) made it clear it was willing to stand shoulder to shoulder with the Prime Minister to help her full-fill her pledge to make 2012 the year of the job, and now we are keen to work with the Government to see Australia become a global food superpower.

"In its current form the Draft Basin Plan is a job destroyer and if we are to become a food producing power house we need water to produce food and fibre.

"Prime Minister Gillard previously stated; "... as the Party of jobs, we govern for jobs" yet this is already being sorely tested by the failure of the Draft Basin Plan to deliver a social, economic and environmental triple bottom line.

"To put it simply if we don't grow the food or fibre, the food manufacturing sector, which is the country's largest, will have nothing to process and jobs will disappear.

"Already the Australian Food and Grocery Council has warned the Government that food manufacturing has already reached a tipping point with over 130,000 jobs at threat of disappearing in the sector in the next nine years without serious reforms.

If the Government is serious about its claim that it wants to take advantage of the abilities of the worlds' best farmers then it has to engage, listen and invest in producers.

For example the budget should;

- Replace the [millions of dollars](#) raided from the \$5.8 billion infrastructure fund and allocated to fund non irrigation infrastructure projects.
- Increase funding for programs like Caring for Country targeted to ensure the MDBA Basin Plan is not a 'just add water' one-trick pony
- Increase funding for RD&E as recommended by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Regional Australia.
- Boost funding for quarantine services in line with the Beale Review Recommendations.
- Maintain the diesel fuel rebate as the rapidly increasing cost of energy is now a major headache for many irrigators and irrigation infrastructure operators.
- Increase funding for roads, rail and ports so we can get our products to Asian markets.
- Fund initiatives to remove the green tape currently strangling primary producers

"We also need better integration of policies across local, State and Federal Government agencies," he said.

Mr Chesson said he hoped the Prime Minister may find the time in her busy schedule to come to irrigation dependent communities to explain how her Governments' Draft Basin Plan and economic policies will result in Australia becoming a global food producing superpower.

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