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WATER REFORM NEEDS TO GET BACK ON TRACK

The National Irrigators' Council has urged all Australian governments to recommit to the water reform process to ensure a sustainable future for irrigation and food and fibre production across the country.

NIC CEO, Danny O'Brien, was commenting after the release of the National Water Commission's biennial assessment of progress in implementing the National Water Initiative.

"The report highlights that water reform has stalled in Australia and action needs to be taken to get it back on track. Effectively it states that governments haven't met the commitments they agreed to in the National Water Initiative in 2004.

"We agree with the NWC that the lack of progress is harming irrigators through denying them the information, clarity and confidence they need for planning and investment decisions," Mr O'Brien said.

"Irrigators need certainty and we were hopeful that the NWI would provide that certainty. There have been enormous gains over the years but there is more to be done and irrigators want governments to get on with the job so they have the confidence to keep on producing the quality food and fibre that Australians need."

Mr O'Brien said the NIC also backed the NWC's statement that the "aims and results of some environmental watering are still unclear".

"Irrigators are working to help governments restore the health of rivers and streams but we want to see clear aims and outcomes identified to ensure that achieving water for the environment is not just a political exercise.

"We concur with the NWC that state barriers to trade are harmful to irrigators and the effective operation of water markets and should be removed. We also agree with the recommendation that states and the Commonwealth should clearly define how they will apply 'risk assignment' provisions – that is, who pays for future reductions in water availability – in their jurisdictions."

Mr O'Brien said that the finding that "overallocation" had not been dealt with somewhat missed the point.

"Overallocation is not really the problem – it is addressing overuse that is the concern. A water entitlement is an entitlement to a *share* of the consumptive pool available at any given time. The system of allocations that are announced progressively by the states throughout the year ensure that irrigators receive only a share of the available pool in that year. Irrigators can't take water that's not there or that is already allocated for other purposes."

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