



# Strategic Plan 2021

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## How this plan will be used

This plan is an evolving and living document. It will be under constant review with a view to ensuring it is meeting contemporary needs as they develop and as milestones are met. It is not a set and forget document, it serves as both strategic guide and cornerstone document for NIC Board and management, and as an evolving work plan.

The Strategic Plan will be reviewed by members on an annual basis at the Annual General Meeting. The Chair and CEO will report on progress against KPIs and goals and present an annual work plan for the year ahead.

This plan is supported by a Communications Plan, Government Relations Plan and an Operations Plan:

- The [Communications Plan](#) outlines NIC's internal and external communications goals, audience, channels and messages, as well as its brand and public relations efforts, including communications stakeholders.
- The [Government Relations Plan](#) outlines the organisation's regulatory and political environment, industry analysis, access and engagement strategies, public policy issues, political and other stakeholders, and a State-by-State overview.
- The [Operations Plan](#) outlines NIC's risk, financial and staff management plans, governance rules, investment strategy and internal policies on membership and other operational matters.

## Foreword

The National Irrigators' Council is the voice of irrigated agriculture across Australia. We have members representing a broad cross-section of the industry, both inside and outside the Murray-Darling Basin.

As the industry group for irrigated agriculture, our mission is to advocate for public policy which benefits the industry. To do so, we actively engage with decision makers including politicians, their staff, the public service and other stakeholders. We inform, we listen and we debate ideas, but we always seek to collaborate in the best interests of all water users. We are committed to the triple bottom line outcomes of water use, including for local communities, the environment, and for local and the national economies.

NIC also engages in public relations and communications on behalf of the industry. We seek to promote the value of irrigated agriculture to our national and local economies, and to our international trade. Australian growers help feed and clothe Australia and the world, and the industry is a jobs and economic powerhouse. NIC exists to help promote these messages and to dispel myths and correct the record about the industry. We do so, through a mix of communications channels, including both traditional and social media.

We strongly support the goal of reaching \$100 billion in agricultural production by 2030 and we are committed to growing the industry. We also champion best practices across the industry and promote Australian farmers who are the most efficient and effective growers in the world. NIC also engages on affordable and reliable energy for the sector. With this in mind, NIC is the convenor of the Agriculture Energy Taskforce – a group of the peak bodies in agriculture from around Australia – to collaborate and advocate on energy issues.

This new Strategic Plan is the foundation document setting out the organisation's vision, mission, values, principles, objectives, key performance indicators, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, goals and anti-goals. It is an evolving document which will be updated and reviewed as goals and objectives are met, and new tasks are added.

The document serves as the overarching plan for the organisation and as the starting point for the three tactical plans for the NIC. The three tactical plans are internal documents focused on how the NIC will manage its communications and public relations, its government relations and public policy, and its operations and internal policy.

As a membership based organisation, our plans and policies are all driven by our members, for our members and are adopted by consensus of the membership. It is important to note that our members are passionate locals. They support the industry and their local communities, and have asked NIC to advocate for a stronger, more successful and sustainable rural and regional Australia.

To find out more about NIC and our policy positions, please visit [www.irrigators.org.au](http://www.irrigators.org.au) and feel free to engage with us [@Nat Irrigators](https://www.facebook.com/NatIrrigators) on Facebook and Twitter, or by email to [ceo@irrigators.org.au](mailto:ceo@irrigators.org.au).

Jeremy Morton  
Chair

Isaac Jeffrey  
Chief Executive Officer

## Overview and Constitution

The National Irrigators' Council is the national peak body representing irrigators in Australia, supporting 32 member organisations covering the Murray Darling Basin states, as well as irrigation regions and the major agricultural commodity groups around Australia. Membership of the Council includes water entitlement holders, irrigation infrastructure operators and organisations which are indirectly involved in the irrigation industry.

NIC is the voice of those involved in irrigated agriculture who produce food and fibre for Australia, and who help feed and clothe our neighbours and friends around the world through international trade. The total gross value of irrigated agricultural production in Australia in 2017-18 was \$17.7 billion, with gross value of irrigation production for the Murray Darling Basin region valued at \$8.6 billion.<sup>1</sup> It is important to note, that the multiplier effect of this money in our local communities has a significant impact on our economy.

Irrigated agriculture produces essential food such as milk, fruit, vegetables, rice, grains, sugar, nuts, meat and other commodities such as cotton and wine. NIC aims to develop policy and projects to ensure the efficiency, viability and sustainability of Australian irrigated agriculture and the security and reliability of water entitlements.

Additionally, NIC aims to help build the irrigated agriculture industry's social license through public and community relations. The focus is placed on informing the public of: the role of irrigated agriculture in feeding and clothing the nation and the world; our impact on the economic and local jobs; the changing nature of agriculture, including the investment in technology and commitment to best practices; and the industry's commitment to environmental, economic and community outcomes.

As the voice of irrigators across Australia, NIC aims to: develop projects and policies which ensure the efficiency, viability and sustainability of Australian irrigated agriculture and the security and reliability of water entitlements; and to promote those projects and policies with a view to achieving bipartisan adoption or ratification by governments, statutory authorities and other groups and organisations.

The NIC was created in 2008 to represent the interests of irrigation entitlement holders across Australia. A summit of representative groups across the industry recognised the need for a strong, independent and unified voice for irrigators across Australia, particularly with the Commonwealth Government playing an increasingly greater role in water policy. NIC members are not individual irrigators, but their respective representative and associated organisations. An 'irrigator' is defined as a person or body who owns, has access to and/or uses water irrigation entitlement for commercial agricultural production.

NIC is committed to representing all irrigators, no matter where they are or what they produce. The Council meets regularly to discuss and debate matters of policy. Policy is determined by consensus agreement of our members at General and Annual General Meetings. NIC's Board has a mix of state representation and skills-based experience, manages the administration of the Council with the Chief Executive Officer handling day-to-day operations. With a presence in Canberra, NIC has direct access to decision makers at a political level ensuring the voice of irrigators across Australia is heard directly in shaping public policy. Constitution is available [here](#).

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/industry/agriculture/gross-value-irrigated-agricultural-production/2017-18>

## Vision

Our vision is for a vibrant, respected and sustainable Australian irrigation industry.

## Mission

Our mission is to secure the long-term interests of our members and our industry.

## Guiding Principles

- Irrigators understand sustainable communities and industries depend on a healthy environment and river system.
- Irrigators expect water property rights to be recognised, secure and protected.
- Irrigators expect characteristics of water entitlements and rights to not be altered by ownership.
- Irrigators do not accept negative third-party impacts on water reliability or availability, however should they occur, impacts must be compensated or mitigated through negotiation with affected parties.
- Irrigators believe water and energy are issues affecting all Australians and should be a bipartisan public policy area.
- Irrigators need affordable and reliable energy to ensure the sector remains sustainable and competitive.
- Irrigators must be fully and effectively engaged in the development of relevant policy.
- Irrigators expect an efficient, open, fair and transparent water market.
- Irrigators require a consistent national approach to water management subject to relevant geographical and hydrological characteristics.
- Irrigators expect Government policy to deliver triple bottom line outcomes.
- Irrigators expect regulatory reform cost burdens to be minimised and apportioned equitably.
- Irrigators understand the importance of social license for the industry to operate and agree to work towards environmental, social and economic outcomes for local communities.

## Values

1. **Community** – Our members want strong, healthy and vibrant communities, because they are locals too.
2. **Collaboration/Bipartisanship** – We will seek to collaborate and engage with stakeholders from all walks of life to discuss issues, explore ideas and work together to achieve solutions.
3. **Integrity** – Trust, honesty, truth and respect are what we will bring to the table and what we believe we see in others.
4. **Leadership** – We will strive to represent our members, their local communities and those directly and indirectly involved in irrigation to advocate for a strong sector which benefits all.
5. **Prosperity** – We will seek policy settings which enhance the economic, social and environmental prosperity of members and their local communities.
6. **Sustainability** – Our members understand that water is a precious resource and as such seek to promote best practice in water use and management, including through partnerships with environmental water holders.
7. **Innovation** – Our members are committed to investing in and promoting technology, and best practices in water and energy.



## Objectives

Our objectives are to:

- Continue to be recognised by Government and Industry as the national peak body for irrigated agriculture.
- Protect the security of water as a property right.
- Promote the importance of irrigated agriculture and enhance its social license.
- Advocate for affordable and reliable energy for the productive sector.

### Continue to be recognised by government and industry as the national peak body for irrigated agriculture

It is important to ensure the sustainability of the NIC's current membership and to identify opportunities to grow membership across all states and territories to build the organisation's reputation as the national peak body for irrigated agriculture.

Relationships developed with government, political leaders across all parties and senior officials from Commonwealth agencies enable the NIC direct access to decision makers and build the reputation of the organisation as a visible advocate for the sector.

Developing strategic alliances with multiple stakeholders will enable the NIC to grow its reputation and lead sector peak bodies on issues impacting on irrigated agriculture.

NIC will build on its policy platform by providing submissions to government inquiries, issue media statements and provide opinion pieces to ensure the visibility of the organisation in its role as the national peak body for irrigated agriculture and the voice of irrigation communities.

NIC will continue to be seen as a trusted bi-partisan adviser to government, parliament, industry, media and the general public. The organisation will provide national leadership on irrigation and the issues relevant to our nation's food and fibre producers.

NIC will collaborate with other existing peak bodies and industry groups to advance common positions on issues and to add weight to causes beneficial to our members.

To support this objective, NIC will look to grow its membership, including new members from outside the Basin and in other States with low or no representation at the time of writing the plan. NIC will also seek to build its brand and the social license of the industry.

NIC will also maintain effective and efficient internal policies and governance to ensure the organisation is managed in the best interests of our members.

### Protect the security of water as a property right

Water entitlement reform was a fundamental building block of the 2004 National Water Initiative. The agreement established a property right to water which is a share of the available resource. It required governments to improve the security and commercial certainty of entitlements by documenting how water users would bear the risks of reduced entitlements if water became scarce.

When water users have a legally-defined share of water that is safe from government interference, illegal take and arbitrary change, it becomes a financial asset. This can be used in much the same way as land held as a financial asset; it can be bought and sold, borrowed against and used to invest.

The principle of water as a property right must be upheld. Water property rights provide our members with authority over their asset, allowing them exclusive access to the asset and the right to exclude others from accessing this right.

Water property rights provide an important underpinning in support of business investment and form part of the assets of a business enterprise.

The existence of property rights in water is considered a necessary precondition to water trading. Property rights are recognised as being stable, secure and flexible and are capable of sustaining a water market.

Property rights are also a fundamental condition on which water reform is based, with governments committing to recognise the right and to recover water by buying voluntarily from willing sellers where deemed necessary instead of just changing rules to reduce access without compensation as occurred historically by the states.

NIC will work constructively and collaboratively with government and other stakeholders to maintain property rights. The organisation will seek to educate, inform, listen and cooperate with stakeholders to ensure fair and balanced public policy, especially as collectively we prepare for the Basin Plan Review in 2026 and the next steps in the National Water Initiative.

### Promote the importance of irrigated agriculture and enhance its social licence

Irrigated agriculture is a major economic contributor to the nation. Food and fibre production from Australia's diverse irrigation communities, contributes to Australia's manufacturing sector.

Opportunities for well-informed debate on the national benefit of food and fibre production are limited. These limitations are magnified by an increased public consciousness and debate on environment and climate change issues.

The NIC will continue to promote at every opportunity through stakeholders and the media, at a national and local level, the positive contribution of irrigated agriculture and flow on benefits to irrigation communities.

The NIC as the peak body for irrigated agriculture will take a proactive role in building, maintaining and defending the industry's social license. A mix of communications strategies as well as public policy and government relations efforts will be employed to ensure the importance of the industry is publicised and accepted. Irrigated agriculture plays a vital role in our national and local economies, our ability to feed and clothe Australians, and on our international trade – and this should be widely supported and celebrated.

### Advocate for affordable and reliable energy for the productive sector

Agriculture is not always the first industry people think of when it comes to energy, but affordable and reliable energy is vital for the sector. Agricultural businesses use energy for pumps, refrigeration, equipment and into the future they may also need supply for recharging electric vehicles, tools and equipment.

As our nation transitions to renewables and moves towards net zero emissions, thought must be given to the affordability, reliability and dispatchability of energy.

As a major overhead for our sector, energy costs must be kept at reasonable levels, while supply must be dependable to ensure the smooth operation of businesses.

NIC will continue to advocate for energy policies which acknowledge our industry's place in moving towards a net zero future while not unnecessarily burdening the sector with high costs or unreliable supply.



### Vision

### Mission

### Objectives

### Actions

Our vision is for a vibrant, respected and sustainable Australian irrigation industry

Our mission is to secure the long-term interests of our members and our industry

Continue to be recognised by Government and Industry as the national peak body for irrigated agriculture

- NIC will remain fit-for-purpose, ensuring sound governance processes and adequate resourcing to meet and deliver our vision and mission.
- NIC will sustain and grow its membership, including expanding membership in under-represented states.
- NIC will build and maintain productive working relationships with politicians, bureaucrats and their staff to contribute to policy debates, advocate for the industry and share information.
- NIC will establish strategic alliances and partnerships to amplify and promote our brand and messaging.
- NIC will provide submissions to inquiries and maintain a suite of public policies to ensure our messages are heard and are considered.
- NIC will harness our members' corporate knowledge and industry know how through reference groups and sub-committees to collaborate on policy.
- NIC will build and promote its brand, messaging and reputation as a bipartisan and trusted adviser.

Protect the security of water as a property right

- NIC will advocate for public policy which reflects our guiding principles, including the protection of water as a property right, limiting third party impacts and consistent water policy across the country.
- NIC will engage with relevant stakeholders in developing the next iteration of the National Water initiative, the National Water Grid and in responding to the ACCC Water Markets Report and Advisory Panel.
- NIC will work with key decision makers to ensure the focus on and balance of the triple bottom line of the Basin Plan is upheld, particularly during and following the 2024 review.
- NIC will continue to advocate for transparency and accountability in water management.
- NIC will continue to push for action on deliverability and conveyance risks, complementary measures and constraints issues.
- NIC will engage with relevant Parliamentary Committees and Inquiries.

Promote the importance of irrigated agriculture and enhance its social license

- NIC will promote the role of irrigated agriculture in our communities and throughout Australia.
- NIC will promote the importance of the industry in delivering food and fibre to feed and clothe Australia.
- NIC will champion the industry's role in trade and the economic benefits of the industry for local communities and the nation.
- NIC will work with stakeholders to share information on best practice water management.
- NIC will celebrate the industry's connections with other industries, including food and fibre processing, which are creating local jobs.
- NIC will contribute to public debate to be the voice of the industry, including engaging in traditional and social media, and running other campaigns, such as sustainable stories.
- NIC will support members by sharing policy, media releases, social posts, letters and other materials which can be used for local knowledge building, media, social media and advocacy.

Advocate for affordable and reliable energy for the productive sector

- NIC will continue to convene the Agriculture Energy Taskforce of peak agricultural bodies in Australia.
- NIC will advocate for a ceiling of 8 cents for electrons and 8 cents for network costs of energy for primary producers to achieve competitive advantage.
- NIC will elevate the industry's importance during the energy market transition bringing it front of mind for decision makers.
- NIC will contribute to debates and make submissions on the post-2025 design of the National Energy Grid.
- NIC will engage on support, best practices and policy related to the transition of the energy market, in particular as more renewables move into the system.
- NIC will support our nation moving to a net zero emissions economy by 2050.