



National Irrigators' Council

Food · Fibre · Future

Annual Report 2021-2022

**ADVOCATING FOR THE AUSTRALIAN IRRIGATED
AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY**



CONTENTS

Introduction 3

Overview..... 3

Vision..... 4

Principles..... 4

Objectives..... 4

Values..... 5

Mission 4

Strategic Plan..... 6

Our Members..... 6

Board & Executive Team..... 10

New Head Office Staff..... 14

Chair's Message..... 16

Chief Executive's Message..... 19

Branding & Website Refresher..... 22

Advocacy..... 24

Sub-Committees..... 26

Ag Energy Taskforce..... 28

Australia's Food & Fibre Producers..... 24

INTRODUCTION

The National Irrigators' Council (NIC) was formed in 2008 to be the voice of irrigators across Australia. It aims to develop projects and policies to 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 having them adopted or ratified by governments, statutory authorities and other groups and organisations.

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 a greater role in water policy. NIC members are not individual irrigators, but their respective representative organisations. An 'irrigator' is defined as "a person or body with irrigation entitlement for commercial agricultural production".

The 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. Adoption of policy is on a consensus basis.

This Annual Report 2021-22 outlines the activities of the NIC for the year and its plans for the future. It also outlines the current positioning of the NIC, the industry and relevant public policy positions.

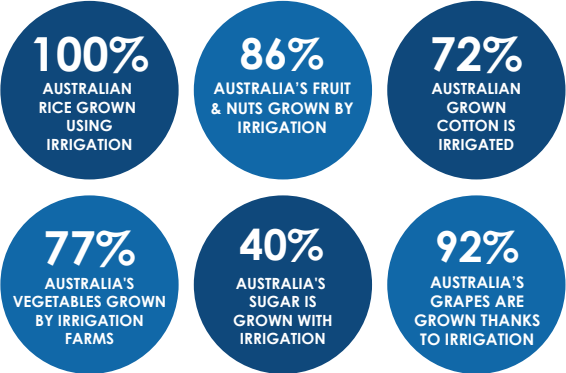


OVERVIEW

The NIC is the peak body representing irrigators in Australia, supporting thirty-one member organisations across the Murray-Darling Basin States and irrigation regions around the country. We represent major agricultural commodity groups with members collectively holding over 5,000,000 megalitres of water entitlement.

NIC is the voice of irrigated agriculture and the industries producing food and fibre for domestic consumption and significant export income. Our policy and advocacy is dedicated to a viable and productive irrigated agriculture sector in Australia. In 2020-21, Australia experienced its second back to back year of high rainfalls thanks to La Nina weather conditions which meant less water was used for irrigation. Subsequently, the irrigated agriculture industry was valued at \$15 billion and accounted for a quarter of all agricultural production in Australia. The main irrigated agriculture commodities were*:

- Fruit and nuts (excluding grapes) at \$4.7 billion
- Vegetables at \$3.2 billion
- Dairy products at \$2.4 billion
- Grapes at \$1.4 billion
- Nurseries, turf and flowers \$1.3 billion
- Sugar cane \$501 million
- Cereals and grains \$260 million
- Hay and other broadacre crops \$253 million
- Cotton at \$181 million
- Rice at \$38 million



*Australian Bureau of Statistics 2020-21, Agricultural Industry Statistics



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

OUR PRINCIPLES

- Irrigators understand sustainable communities and industries depend on a healthy environment and river system
- Irrigators expect water property rights to be secure, protected and recognised
- 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 must 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.

OUR OBJECTIVES

- 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.

OUR 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.

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

STRATEGIC PLAN 2021

OBJECTIVE 1: 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.

OBJECTIVE 2: 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.

OBJECTIVE 3: 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.

OBJECTIVE 4: 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.

OUR MEMBERS

Our members represent a diversity of organisations from food and fibre industries and irrigation infrastructure operators. Council members are not individual irrigators but members of their respective representative organisations.

Members have equal voting rights on all issues including policy development. The Council is committed to representing all irrigators regardless of their location or the food and fibre they produce. Council members meet face to face three times per year to discuss and develop key policies and advocacy. Adoption of policy is on a consensus basis.

Our current members are based throughout Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia, but as a national organisation we are open to members from across Australia.

2021/2022 NIC Members:

- Almond Board of Australia
 - Australian Food and Fibre
 - Argyle Capital Partners
 - Bega Cheese Limited/Tatura Milk Industries
 - Barossa Infrastructure Ltd
 - Barwon Darling Water
 - Border Rivers Food and Fibre
 - Bundaberg Regional Irrigators Group
 - Central Downs Irrigators Ltd
 - Coleambally Irrigation Co-operative Ltd
 - Central Irrigation Trust
 - Duxton Capital
 - Cotton Australia
 - Irrigation Australia Ltd
- Gwydir Valley Irrigators Association Inc
 - Lachlan Valley Water
 - Kilter Rural
 - Macquarie River Food and Fibre
 - Murrumbidgee Groundwater
 - Murrumbidgee Irrigation Ltd
 - Murrumbidgee Private Irrigators' Inc
 - Renmark Irrigation Trust
 - Olam Orchards Australia Pty Ltd
 - Riverina Winegrape Growers
 - Pioneer Valley Water Co-operative Ltd
 - Ricegrowers' Association of Australia Inc
 - Smartdrivers
 - South Australian Murray Irrigators
 - Western Murray Irrigation Limited



OUR BOARD & EXECUTIVE TEAM



JEREMY MORTON

CHAIR

Jeremy was elected to the NIC board in October 2018.

Jeremy is a rice farmer from Moulamein in Southern NSW and has been President of Ricegrowers Association of Australia since 2015.

He was born in Swan Hill and has been an active participant in community activities and the implementation of the Murray Darling Basin Plan over many years.



KAREN HUTCHINSON

DEPUTY CHAIR

Karen is part of the senior management at Murrumbidgee Irrigation Limited. She has been at the cutting edge of water policy development for the last decade and is currently a member of the MDBA's Basin Community Committee.

Karen has an Honours degree from the Australian National University, is a graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors and was awarded the prestigious RIRDC NSW Rural Women of the Year in 2011.



MICHAEL MURRAY

TREASURER

Michael Murray is the National Water Manager and Queensland Policy Manager for Cotton Australia and was formerly Chief Executive Officer of the Gwydir Valley Irrigators' Association, based in Moree in northern NSW.

He was elected to the NIC board in 2009.



BERNIE GEORGE

DIRECTOR

Bernie George was elected to the NIC board in 2012. He is responsible for the water assets of Australian Food and Fibre. The company grows, processes and markets cotton and food crops.

Bernie has extensive experience in large scale irrigated agriculture, land and water asset development and natural resource management. He is a past Chairman of Cotton Australia and a graduate of the Australian Rural Leadership Program.



CAREN MARTIN

DIRECTOR

Caren, along with her husband Drew own and manage an Almond Orchard at Murtho in South Australia and are currently raising a young family. Having previously worked for the state government in the groundwater and wetland areas, Caren took on the leadership role as the chairperson of the South Australian Murray Irrigators group in 2009. She is also a current serving councillor and chairperson of the Natural Heritage Committee for the National Trust of South Australia (NTSA), a role she has held for the past four years.



JENNY McLEOD

DIRECTOR

Jenny is the Policy and Communication Manager with Coleambally Irrigation Co-operative Limited a member owned gravity irrigation supply scheme in the Murrumbidgee Valley. Jenny also owns and operates with her family an irrigated cropping farm in the NSW Murray.

Jenny has extensive experience in water policy and government relations. Jenny has a tertiary qualification in Agricultural Science and Communications and is a Graduate of the Institute of Company Directors. Jenny is also a director of Finley Regional Care (a not for profit based supply medical and aged care services in the southern Riverina).



MICHAEL NEVILLE

DIRECTOR

Michael has been working within the agriculture industry all his working life.

He has been directly involved in corporate agriculture since 1998 developing scaled landscapes for Australian Superannuation Investments such as Retail Employees Superannuation Trust (REST) and Vic Super, a public sector industry fund where his brief was to rejuvenate, change a farming system and develop a sustainable landscape team culture to operate 3500 ha of irrigated agriculture enterprises including processing tomatoes, cotton, conventional & organic cereal production, combined with a focus on eco system protection.



ROSALIE AURICHT

DIRECTOR

Rosalie is the Chief Executive Officer of the Renmark Irrigation Trust in South Australia. She was elected to the NIC Board in October 2021 and brings with her a range of valuable business management experience in the areas of finance, negotiation and systems thinking.

Rosalie also serves on the Murraylands and Riverland Landscape Board's Water Advisory Committee, SA River Murray Strategic Water Issues Consultation Steering Committee and the Katarapko Community Advisory Panel.



STEVEN FORD

DIRECTOR

Steven is the General Manager of Pioneer Valley Water and he was elected to the NIC Board in October 2021. During his career in the oil and gas industry he was involved with several international water management projects.

Steven has extensive senior management experience across the areas of strategy and leadership, sales and marketing, managing change, creative thinking and implementation. He has been recognised by Boards for innovative business development, maximising revenues and delivering projects on time and within budget.



PHILLIP SNOWDEN

DIRECTOR

Phil, along with his wife Lynda have been operating a mixed irrigated and dryland farm near Tocumwal since 1990. Phil was elected to the NIC Board in October 2021, and he brings a wealth of knowledge to NIC from his time serving on the boards of Murray Irrigation and Southern Growers.

Phil has been recognised by the Berrigan Shire for both on-farm environmental works in 2006 and the Business Person/Entrepreneur of the Year in 2009. He also received the National Farmers Federation Innovation in Agriculture Award for New Technology in 2010.



ISAAC JEFFREY

CEO

Isaac Jeffrey was appointed as CEO in December 2020. Isaac has a background in government, small business, and public and government relations. He spent over a decade in government holding roles which included Chief of Staff and Principal Private Secretary to various Federal Ministers. Isaac has a Master of Politics and Policy and a Bachelor of Business (Honours). He is a country boy at heart, having grown up in Gunnedah in North West NSW, and he is passionate about regional issues and empowering local communities.



JOY THOMAS

FORMER PUBLIC POLICY OFFICER

After serving NIC for over 8 years, Joy departed NIC in May 2022.

Joy comes from a background in federal politics, serving for many years as an adviser and Chief of Staff to Ministers in the Howard Government.

She previously held senior management positions with the Australian Medicare Local Alliance (AML Alliance) and Australian General Practice Network (AGPN). Her early life began in rural Australia, followed by several years working in remote areas of Papua New Guinea.

Thank you to Joy for your service. NIC wishes you well in your future endeavours.

NEW STAFF



REBECCA TURPIE

ADMINISTRATION OFFICER

Rebecca joined the NIC team in March 2022.

Rebecca has spent her career working in a range of diverse roles across marketing, print advertising, event management and graphic design. In her spare time, she enjoys sewing, cake decorating and volunteering.

Rebecca has spent the past 12 years running a home-based graphic design studio. She brings a range of business operations skills that will support the growth of NIC into the future.



GREG HOSKING

PUBLIC POLICY OFFICER

Greg commenced with NIC on 8 August 2022 as the Public Policy Officer. He has worked across a number of sectors including; agriculture, politics, policy and ecological consulting.

Greg is passionate about rural Australia and enjoys spending time working on the family farm. When he isn't working, Greg coaches athletics, paddles whitewater kayaks and enjoys travelling with his wife Rose.

Through his work, Greg hopes to improve outcomes for rural Australian communities.





CHAIR'S MESSAGE

NIC celebrates its 14th anniversary this year and it is fair to say the next period will be unlike anything we have seen since the Basin Plan was introduced. A new government, more elections, changing policy, numerous reviews and an uncertain future. This is the position the irrigated agriculture sector finds itself in mid-2022.

In the next few years, we will see: the next iteration of the National Water Initiative; the Outlook, Evaluation and Review of the Murray Darling Basin Plan; the transition of the Australian energy market; the Productivity Commission's review of the Plan; the review of the Water Act; the reestablishment of the National Water Commission; the implementation of water markets reform; and much more, including the return of La Nina and the cycle into a drier period in the years to come.

With so much change, and myriad opportunities and challenges coming down the pipeline, the Board has put the National Irrigators' Council on a path of renewal and growth to ensure it can adapt and remain the effective voice our industry needs. Let me make it clear, there are countless voices out there who want to see our industry shut down – without any acknowledgment of what that will do to food and fibre supplies for Australians. NIC needs to continue to be the strong voice of our industry and to grow our capability to counter these threats.

Together, NIC members agreed on a new Strategic Plan which we have been implementing for the past 12 months. The first objective is about ensuring NIC is fit-for-purpose into the future. I am pleased to report that NIC is progressing well against all seven actions listed for this objective.

To achieve this objective, the Board agreed to join the Associations Forum which helps organisations with everything from fundraising tips to constitutional advice. The Forum reviewed the NIC Constitution and the Board worked with the Chief Executive Officer

over a period of months to draft changes to the document. These changes range from minor grammatical changes to legally required changes and to changes designed to increase flexibility so NIC can become more agile and adaptable. These modifications are designed to enhance NIC and strengthen it for the future. The draft changes will be circulated to Members in coming months and on behalf of the Board I recommend them to the Council for adoption.

We have started a process to review our membership structure, again with the assistance of the Associations Forum. The Forum have helped organisations with very few members right through to those with thousands of members structure their memberships and fees to ensure the organisation is delivering value for money and a return on investment to members, while positioning the organisation to deliver on its objectives. We have adopted a new contributions policy and have asked the CEO to start reaching out to potential contributors and new members to strengthen NIC's financial position, add weight to our campaigns and brand, and take pressure off our existing membership contributions. We will be reaching out to members to discuss ideas and options following the membership review in the near future.

During the past year, NIC has relocated to a new, more professional office at the National Press Club. It has more space and includes a Board Room for NIC sub-committee and Board meetings. It is a resource available to our members during their trips to Canberra, so please feel free to reach out to the Head Office team to drop in for a visit and to use the space.

We have also had some staff changes. Joy Thomas has vacated her role with NIC after eight years. On behalf of the Board and members of NIC, I thank Joy for her effort and hard work over the years. In particular, I thank her for drafting and coordinating our position statements and submissions, for heading up the work with the Ag Energy Taskforce and for her tireless contributions to administration of NIC, including managing our general and annual general meetings. Joy has taken on a new role with the Energy Charter to Chair the biannual energy and agriculture roundtables, so we look forward to continuing to work with Joy into the future.

In recognition of the growth and change plan, NIC has hired two new staff. Greg Hosking has joined the team in the Public Policy Officer role. Greg has a wealth of knowledge and experience in the ag policy space and he will head up NIC's policy statements, submissions and public policy work going forward. Greg will also take on an active role in the energy space, leading our contribution to the Ag Energy Taskforce. Rebecca Turpie has joined the team as Administration and Communications Officer. Rebecca has run her own small business and brings a depth of administrative, public relations and communications experience to this new role. Rebecca will be coordinating our general and annual general meetings, and will be supporting the CEO with communications to members and to wider audiences. On behalf of the Board and members I welcome both Greg and Rebecca to NIC and look forward to working with them.

We welcomed Mike Neville, Steven Ford, Rosalie Auricht and Phil Snowden to the Board. All four Directors are making valuable contributions, bringing new and different skillsets and experiences, so it is great to have them on board. We also say thank you to Dale Holliss and Tim Napier who retired from the Board at the annual general meeting. Dale and Tim both put in exceptional effort, and we appreciate their time and contribution to NIC.

The CEO's report will go into more detail on Objectives two, three and four of the strategic plan, but I am happy to report we are making significant progress on achieving the actions items





listed for each. We have been able to create a partnership with the Energy Charter which has resulted in two annual energy roundtables between the ag and energy sectors – something we have been calling on for months. We have a new branding to emphasise NIC's commitment to advocacy for food, fibre and future. And, we are engaging with stakeholders and ensuring we have a seat at the table for all stages up to and including the Murray-Darling Basin Plan review, including its outlook and evaluation stages.

These are examples of some of work we have delivered for our industry, but it is not without its risks and challenges. Varroa mite, trade issues with China, labour shortages, foot and mouth, lumpy skin, shipping and transport, fuel and energy cost increases and market transition, and the war in Ukraine are just some of the issues facing our industry and putting pressure on our members. But by far the greatest risk facing us is the risk of further water recovery.

The Federal Government have promised to deliver the Basin Plan in full, including the 450 GL of efficiency measures. Details are still limited on how exactly the Government will achieve this goal, but with approximately 340 GL of the SDLAM projects at risk, plus the 450 GL, the Minister has said nothing is off the table – including buybacks. If the Government chooses to enter the water market it will have major ramifications for our industry and our country. The price of water will rise affecting input costs and will flow on to consumers. Jobs and regional businesses will be lost, and will have significant impacts on regional communities such as school and hospital resourcing. It will impact businesses up and down the supply chain, including transport workers, manufacturers and processors. It will mean irrigation schemes are left with pockets of land where no water will be delivered, but having to contend with the fixed cost of their infrastructure. And, it will impact trade as less produce is grown and available for sale, which into the future could have significant impacts on our economy, as well as global food and national security.

NIC will continue to work with our members

and external stakeholders to navigate these challenges, and to keep fighting for the future of the irrigated ag sector. We will do this not only for our livelihoods and our local communities, but for the Australian people who may not realise where their food and fibre come from, and how important irrigated agriculture is – and we will be trying to increase that level of understanding too.

Finally, there are elections in New South Wales and Victoria in the near future. These elections are always an opportunity for governments and oppositions to change their policy positions. We will be encouraging all candidates in both states to uphold their commitments to neutral or positive socio-economic commitments and the triple bottom line outcomes of the Basin Plan.

The Board and I realise the gravity of the challenges facing our industry, and we have empowered the CEO to strengthen NIC so we can confront these challenges head on and look for the opportunities they may present. NIC has made significant progress against the strategic plan, but there is more work to be done to get the organisation into a more fit-for-purpose position, to protect water property rights and advocate for better water policy, to champion the need for affordable, reliable and secure energy for the productive sector, and to build and maintain our industry's social license. The Board and management will take the necessary steps to achieve this plan and be the voice our industry needs advocating for food, fibre and future.

Jeremy Morton

Chair

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S MESSAGE

If you think a week's a long time in politics, then let me tell you what was packed into twelve months. It has been an extraordinary time in water and energy policy this year. The election of the new Federal Government has ushered in a new era finally ending the climate wars and setting Australia's long-term emissions and climate position. Climate is at the forefront of government decision making and is already starting to feed into public service advice and thinking.

NIC adopted a new climate policy, including a commitment to net zero emissions by 2050. We support efforts to combat climate change as our members are the ones most directly impacted by it. Climate change and weather variability will have major ramifications for farms, yields, productive capacity, and will have significant impacts on cost of living (think \$12 lettuce) and trade, and potentially food and national security into the future. Farmers need to look after their land and use their water in the most responsible way to ensure its future productivity. They also want to protect the environment and local communities, because they live there – they are the ones who see and experience it every day, and they want it to be pristine. Any thoughts or arguments to the contrary are misguided, ill-informed or are simply outright lies.

As much progress has thankfully been made in the climate space, it has sadly reopened old wounds and there is a flicker towards reigniting the water wars. Unfortunately, politics has again gotten in

the way of good public policy. It continues to amaze me how a couple of negative stories and an emboldened, but misinformed, lobby can turn community sentiment and unfortunately some minds in the political class. Regardless of what they say, farmers aren't the bad guys. Growing food and fibre to feed and clothe the country and world, and turning a profit so you can feed and clothe your own families should be celebrated!

The Basin Plan and water policy are too important for partisanship, they should be bipartisan – because they are fundamentally about our ability to feed ourselves and protect our environment, while driving jobs, trade and outcomes for local communities. No one is saying it's easy, in fact it is the most complex water management system in the world, but we can't let it deteriorate into all out water war.

Objective two of NIC's strategic plan is about protecting water rights and advocating for sound water policy. NIC continues to pursue every opportunity to ensure we deliver on this objective. We are building new partnerships and reaching out to other interest groups and stakeholders to work through ideas. The next few years will be a period unlike any since the Basin Plan was adopted. The Plan review process kicks off next year with a Basin Outlook – looking into the future to see what the Basin may be like in the years to come. It is fair to say the Outlook will say it is going to be hotter and drier, but it should also say there will be significantly more variable rainfall, inflows and extreme weather events. It should also note that while Australia experiences hotter and drier conditions, other countries including Pacific partners and Southeast Asian nations will likely be experiencing the complete opposite. Both scenarios could see extreme pressure placed on domestic food security and trade relationships. Additionally, Australia will have a role in helping feed other countries during these periods too.

The second phase of the review will be the Evaluation stage assessing whether the Basin Plan has achieved its goals. This evaluation should be focused on more than just the volumes. It should

consider how the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder has achieved bird and fish breeding events throughout the whole Basin from north to south, east to west this year. It should consider how constraints still plague the system. It should consider, as I noted above, how we have been able to feed and clothe ourselves and create jobs and trade opportunities. It should consider how local communities and river systems are thriving. Ultimately, it should consider how the Plan is already in fact working. It places human needs first, it adjusts allocations according to availability, which includes changes in inflows and climate, and it provides balance between the productive sector, environment and community.

The final stage is the Review itself which will take a deep dive into the Plan and make recommendations on any amendments needed considering both the Outlook and Evaluation. During this period, there will also be another five-year review of the Basin Plan by the Productivity Commission and the review of the Water Act which will be taken into consideration. Unlike others, I will reserve judgement on what the review should say and any recommendations until after we have seen the Outlook and Evaluation. NIC will engage wherever and whenever we can in these processes to ensure irrigated ag is heard and considered. I would also caution the Public Service and politicians to wait until they see those reports before making any assumptions of if or what amendments need to be made to the Plan. Don't jump the gun. Consider the science. Explore the evidence. Use commonsense. Remember there needs to be balance.

With all of the above happening, it should be noted we haven't taken our eye off the various

other plates which are spinning, including national water reform, infrastructure investment and water markets reform. We are engaging with these various activities and we are enduring with our campaign to increase accountability and transparency of MinCo, BOC and other public service agencies and decision making processes. We are also continuing our involvement in work on deliverability risks and conveyance losses.

Our fourth objective is about securing affordable and reliable energy for the productive sector and regional energy users. NIC continues to convene the Ag Energy Taskforce and has spearheaded a strong advocacy campaign on energy. We have secured two annual roundtables between the ag and energy sectors. These roundtables will help facilitate information flows between the sectors and ensure we have direct access to the generation and distribution networks' senior leaders to discuss matters from tariff reform to energy market transition and the new grid. We have also continued to meet with AEMO and other public sector agencies to discuss issues surrounding energy market transition and the Integrated Systems Plan to ensure agriculture industries and land holders are being considered and our voice heard. The relationships are significant wins for NIC and the Taskforce, and we will continue to work with the Energy Charter to deliver on this objective.

The final objective is about communications and social license. I am pleased to report we have been making significant gains against the actions listed for this objective. We have launched our new tagline – Food. Fibre. Future. Food means standing up for those who feed our nation and the world. Fibre is to fight for those who grow and produce our everyday textiles for a busy world on

the go. Future is to communicate our sustainable practices and advocate for a sustainable industry for tomorrow. This tagline will shape our comms strategy going forward, summing up in three words why NIC exists and what we are hoping to achieve.

NIC has overhauled its website with more work to come. The new website will be a source of information for our members, the general public, the media, and political and public service decision makers. It aims to provide industry statistics, dispel myths, promote the industry and the truth, and to outline our policy positions. It will be further enhanced to host an interactive industry learning hub to help educate people on irrigation from what is grown to where and how it is grown, and will discuss the history and progress in the industry. We will be considering campaigns and communications plans in particular around the Basin Plan and energy reform and transition into the future, including pulling together our members in a communications committee and reaching out to other industry groups to see how best we can boost each other and share content.

NIC will be engaging with the NSW and Victoria governments and oppositions, as well as the Teal, Green and Independent candidates for the upcoming elections. We will be sharing our election platform with them and inviting them to meet with the industry to share their agriculture, energy and water policies. We are also kicking off our first round of thought leadership sessions in the coming months for members to hear from senior public servants, politicians and other stakeholders on important and relevant issues for industry.

The Chair has already mentioned our progress against objective one of the strategic plan, but I wanted to assure members we are tirelessly focused on delivering the above, while shaping NIC into an agile and adaptable, fit-for-purpose organisation into the future. We need to do this to ensure we can respond to all of the issues listed above and others as they surface. I want to join the Board in welcoming Greg and Rebecca to the team, and in thanking Joy for her service to NIC. I am very confident our new team can continue to deliver for our members and our industry into the future.

Finally, I want to thank all our members and stakeholders for their continued support and engagement. I have enjoyed visiting members throughout the country and hearing from your clients and members directly about your local challenges and opportunities, and I look forward to visiting more members in the coming months. Our strength and access comes from the breadth and depth of our membership, so thank you for your contributions and participation. Together we will ensure the voice of the irrigated ag sector is heard and considered in the important decisions which lie ahead of us.

Isaac Jeffrey

Chief Executive Officer

BRANDING & WEBSITE

BRANDING REFRESHER

To celebrate the National Irrigators' Council's 14th anniversary, we have renewed our logos and tagline as part of a larger communications plan to position the organisation for the next 14 years and beyond.

LOGO DESIGN

The original graphic of ripples across Australia continues. It symbolises the reach of NIC as a national organisation and ripples of water – the primary focus of our policy and communications efforts.

The font selection is smooth, rounded and clean. It emphasises the NIC's values and approach to stakeholder relations which is clear, simple, precise and collaborative. The text is centred to represent the balanced approach we aim for and promote in public policy development and implementation.

Blue has been chosen to complement this message, while embodying the emblematic visual of clean and sustainable water.



TAGLINE

The final addition is the new tagline – **Food. Fibre. Future.** This simple tagline concisely articulates the vision, mission, objectives, values and principles of the NIC.

NIC exists to represent the interests of farmers who grow our food and fibre, the wider industry and the local communities in which they operate for a sustainable future.

Irrigators put **food** on our dining tables, in our children's lunchboxes and in the pantries and fridges of our trading partners around the world. Irrigation farming is responsible for:

- 100% of Australian Rice
- 90% of Australian Fruit, Nuts and Grapes
- 76% of Australian Vegetables
- 50% of Australian Dairy and Sugar.

They grow the **fibre** which is woven into the pillowcases we rest our heads on each night, into the clothing which keeps us warm and protected from the elements, and into towels we use after a shower or during a visit to the beach. Over 80% of Australian Cotton is grown by irrigation farmers with its by-products feeding animals and used in sporting goods, packing materials and medical supplies.

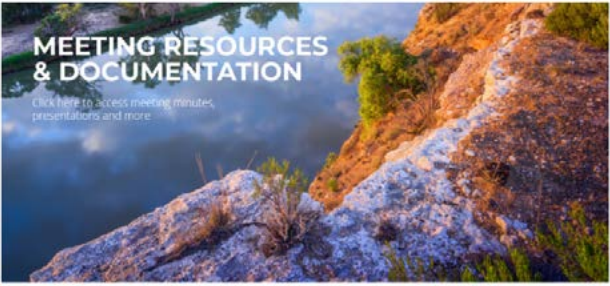
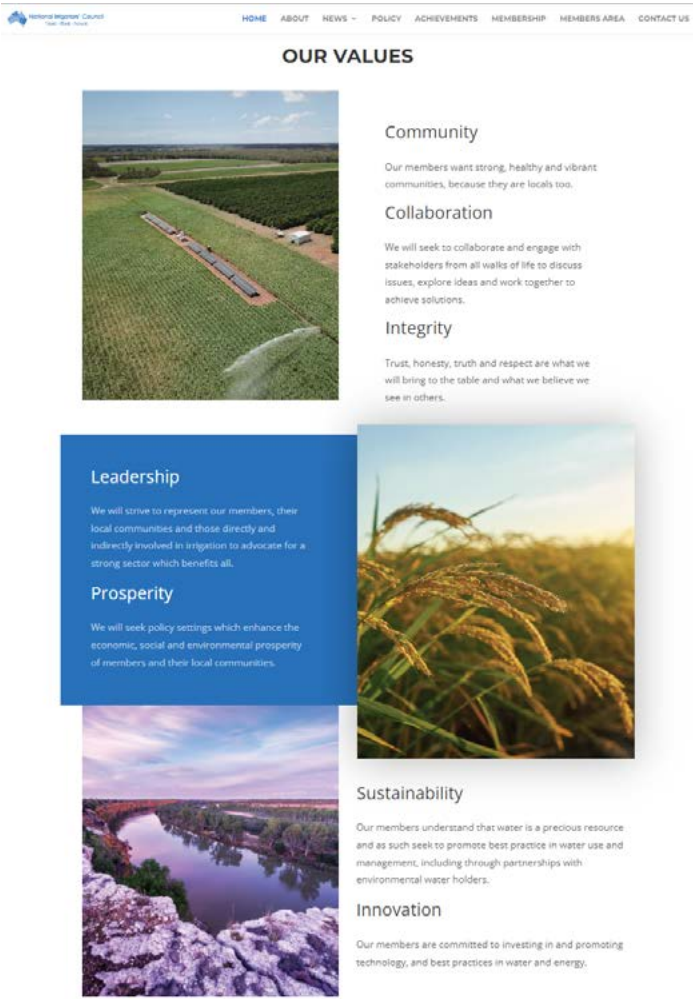
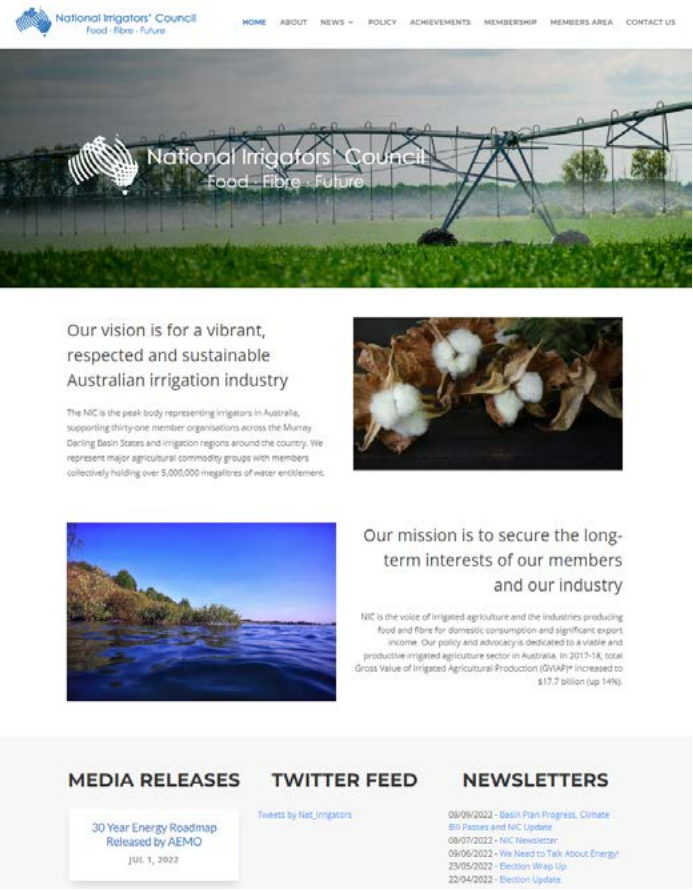
The **future** of the irrigated agriculture industry is vital for our nation's food security and choices. Innovation is ensuring farmers are growing more with less water, adapting to our changing climate and making Australia a world leader in sustainable water management and farming practices. Australian produce is among the highest quality in the world and is grown under the strongest of regulations. A vibrant irrigated agriculture industry now and into the future will ensure Australia remains self-sufficient and contributes to global sustainability and liveability, while supporting local jobs, communities and economies.



WEBSITE REFRESHER

NIC is moving to a purpose driven communications plan to purposely connect with our audiences and improve the industry's social license.

As a part of the communications plan, the NIC website has undergone a complete overhaul and refresh, including the launch of a new members' only log-in section containing exclusive content, resources, and a members' discussion forum.



OUR ADVOCACY

NIC has continued its strong advocacy for the irrigated agriculture sector in 2021-22 through meetings with key stakeholders, submissions to public inquiries, public addresses, social media, media releases and traditional media appearances.

The largest effort in advocacy this year was in the lead up to the 2022 Federal Election. To assist our public policy positioning, we created a Federal Election Platform which was based on two key areas: water and energy. We provided 14 water policy recommendations and 10 energy policy recommendations for the candidates to consider. The platform was distributed to relevant Ministers, Shadow Ministers, Party Leaders, Crossbenchers, Minor Parties, Members of Parliament, Senators and senior staffers. It was also provided to State water and energy ministers.

Water recommendations/NIC policy position:

- Recognise irrigated agriculture's contribution to the economy, regional development and regional jobs.
- Ensure equitable responses to climate change in future national water reform between water users.
- Deliver a renewed and modernised National Water Initiative which is adaptable.
- Foster bipartisan leadership and use the Productivity Commission's 2018 five-year review to deliver the Basin Plan, including the remaining 605 GL SDL Adjustment Mechanism measures, while maintaining the confidence of the agriculture sector and dependent communities.
- Honour guarantee of no negative impact of 450 GL Efficiency Measures program with a continued focus on off-farm projects.
- Retain the current legislated cap on water buybacks.
- Ensure Basin Governments allocate adequate resources for compliance regimes, including to the Inspector-General of Water Compliance, to ensure confidence in the system for users, communities and the public.
- Address delivery constraints and losses for water users.
- Resolve over-recovery issues.
- Examine underuse to understand if rules are fit for purpose, including during periods of high rainfall, and identify opportunities for consumptive users to extract more water in valleys which have historic underuse.
- Maximise community involvement and confidence in environmental watering.
- Evaluate how complementary or non-flow measures, designed to deliver environmental



- improvement, can offset environmental water recovery targets.
- Increase transparency in Water Management Decision Making.
- Ensure outcomes of the 2021 ACCC Water Markets Report delivers practical changes without imposing additional regulatory costs on industry.

Energy recommendations/NIC policy position:

- Ensure energy market design avoids 'gold plating' and that proposed regulatory and/or policy changes include a cost benefit analysis and regional impact statement.
- Deliver a medium to long term price capped at 8 cents per kilowatt-hour for the electrons (R) and 8 cents per kilowatt-hour for the network (N).
- Implement national food and fibre tariff model/s.
- Enable Australian Energy Regulator (AER) to optimise the Regulated Asset Base (RAB) of electricity networks, similar to the pre-2006 National Energy Market rules, for transmission and distribution networks.
- Calculate Rate of Return for network owners based on low risk and low cost of finance models, as opposed to current super normal or monopoly profits based calculations.
- Recognise productive agriculture sector's unique energy needs, acknowledging the sector is vital to Australia's food and fibre production and seeks to be competitive, provide jobs and export opportunities.
- Address the lack of genuine competition, the operation of the contract bidding process and design a market where consumers' interests are fairly represented.
- Undertake genuine and transparent consultation with rural landholders and communities during the development of new generation and transmission infrastructure to mitigate negative impacts.
- Remove network barriers to sharing local energy generation on local networks.
- Reduce the barriers to connecting on-farm generation to the grid.

A number of submissions were made to public inquiries, including Register of Foreign Owned Water Entitlements, Senate Rural & Regional Affairs Reference Committee Water Legislation Amendment(Inspector-General of Water Compliance and Other Measures)Act 2021 and the Energy Security Board Post 2025 Market Design Options Paper. The Chair and CEO also appeared at the Senate Inquiry into the Inspector-General of Water Compliance legislation.

We have met with Ministers, Shadow Ministers, MPs and government agencies at both the Federal and Basin State level, including:

- Murray-Darling Basin Authority
- Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water
- Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder
- Australian Energy Market Regulator
- ACCC Ag Consultative Committee
- ACCC Infrastructure Consultative Committee
- NSW Planning, Industries and Environment
- Climate Change Authority
- Productivity Commission
- Inspector-General of Water Compliance
- Clean Energy Regulator
- Australian Energy Regulator
- CSIRO
- Bureau of Meteorology
- Australian Hydrogen Council.

NIC has also engaged with:

- One Basin CRC
- Energy Charter
- Microgrids Advisory Board
- Aither Water Markets
- IACID/YIP
- Fish Screen Advisory Committee.

We continue to monitor and engage on:

- Basin Plan - Finalising and Future Planning
- Social, Environmental and Economic Science
- Compliance
- First Nations Ownership and Management
- Biosecurity
- Climate Change
- Deliverability Risks and Conveyance Losses
- Energy Market Transition
- Accountability and Transparency
- Water Infrastructure Investment
- Underuse
- National Water Reform
- Water Markets Reform
- Public Sentiment and Social License.



OUR SUB-COMMITTEES



NIC sub-committees play a central role in the development of NIC's policy positions, including advocacy via consultation processes to Government and Government related inquiries.

GROUNDWATER SUB-COMMITTEE

The committee was established in 2009 to provide input on groundwater policy and management, particularly in relation to the Basin Plan.

Working with industry organisations, the committee was instrumental in successfully challenging the proposed reductions in groundwater sustainable diversion limits in the Guide to the Basin Plan.

The committee also directed its attention to the MDBA groundwater trading rules and the proposed changes to the water trigger in the EPBC Act which would allow the responsibility for assessing the impacts of large scale coal mining and coal seam gas developments on water resources to shift from the Commonwealth to the States.

ENERGY SUB-COMMITTEE

The committee has led a strong advocacy campaign, in collaboration with other agriculture industry stakeholders, to bring to the attention of governments, the impact of high electricity costs on the agriculture Sector and to secure an affordable electricity pricing system in Australia to ensure that network supplied electricity remains

a cost effective energy source for food and fibre producers.

High costs have undermined the competitive advantage of our highly productive and efficient agricultural sector, which produces food and fibre for domestic and export markets, and compromised Australia's capacity to be a competitive global food producer to put fresh food on the tables of Australian households.

Through the committee, NIC has highlighted the significant gap in the understanding of the impact on the productive agriculture sector and rural industries to maintain viability and to remain competitive. The committee has advocated for a price objective of a medium to long term price capped at 8 cents per kilowatt-hour for the electrons (R) and a similar ceiling of 8 cents per kilowatt-hour for the network (N).

NIC and the Ag Energy Taskforce (established in 2014) continue to participate in the raft of Government related inquiries and reviews in the energy space as well as supporting, and advocating for, industry transition to renewable technology.

The committee and the Taskforce engage key stakeholders in the energy sector including Energy Consumers Australia (ECA), the Australian Energy Regulator (AER), the Australian Energy Market Commission (AEMC), the Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO), ARENA (Australian Renewable Energy Agency) and the CEFC (Clean Energy Finance Corporation).



IRRIGATION INFRASTRUCTURE OPERATORS (IIO) SUB-COMMITTEE

The Irrigation Infrastructure Operators (IIO) sub-committee was established to help IIOs better understand policy and regulations which affect large scale water distribution organisations.

The IIO committee has met numerous times with a major focus in 2021-22 being water markets reform. The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) handed down its report and Mr Daryl Quinlivan was appointed Principal Adviser to develop a roadmap for reform. The IIO committee provided feedback and advice to Mr Quinlivan and his panel, and heard from the team initial ideas on how reform could be implemented.

The committee also discussed issues including Telstra's 3G network switch off and the implications for metering and telemetry.

BASIN PLAN SUB-COMMITTEE

The Murray Darling Basin Plan sub-committee was established in 2022 with the dual purpose of working towards finalising the current Basin Plan and projecting towards the next Basin Plan.

An area of particular focus for the committee is around the Federal Government's commitment to deliver the plan in full and on time. With two years left to run on the Basin Plan, the Federal Government has yet to reach the environmental water recovery target. The aim of the Basin Plan

sub-committee is to work with the Government in reaching their water for the environment goals without causing socio-economic impacts on irrigation communities throughout the Murray-Darling Basin.

The sub-committee will aim to do this by highlighting to the Federal Government potential water saving projects which could be completed in the near future. However, under the current trajectory it is unlikely the water recovery targets will be met before the 2024 deadline. To help meet the goal the sub-committee plans to look at measures such as allowing new water efficiency projects to begin and extending the 2024 deadline. If the Government adopted this approach, it could enable them to meet their targets without causing undue socio-economic harm through the alternative of voluntary water buybacks.

AG ENERGY TASKFORCE

OBJECTIVES

The Ag Industries Energy the Taskforce is a group of Australia's peak agricultural bodies concerned about the high cost of energy and the resultant negative impacts on the production of the nation's food and fibre. The Taskforce was established in 2014 and is convened by the National Irrigators' Council.

The Taskforce meets regularly to discuss and identify its advocacy approaches in the effort to highlight to Government and other decision makers, the impacts of high energy costs on agricultural industries and food and fibre production in Australia. The Taskforce participates in energy related advisory groups, consumer reference panels and works through other consultative mechanisms. The Taskforce has made more than nineteen submissions to inquiries into Australia's energy system.

Taskforce members and agricultural peak bodies are at a disadvantage in the energy debate, when they do not have highly paid specialists with the necessary technical industry knowledge and the capacity to speak the language of the industry on the same level as network owners. The Taskforce has applied significant effort to raise the visibility of agriculture and the principle of putting consumers first.

Taskforce members collaborate on pooling their limited resources for greater impact on behalf of hard working farmers and those involved in Australia's agricultural industries.

ANNUAL UPDATE

The Ag Energy Taskforce has solidified its working relationship with the Energy Charter - which represents the major generation and distribution networks in Australia.

Our partnership with the Charter has delivered a number of wins, including bi-annual roundtables with the Ag and energy sectors, and a significant body of work on social license and engagement between the sectors.

Our focus continues to be on establishing an eight cents for electrons and eight cents for network cost for regional energy users. We have also championed engagement with farmers on energy market transition, including best practice for transmission companies interactions with farmers.

We have led industry engagement with governments on energy and with agencies, including the Australian Energy Market Operator on its final Integrated Systems Plan (ISP). The ISP provides details on how the energy market will operate in the decades ahead, including detailed plans on our market's transition to renewables.

Other wins by the Ag Energy Taskforce:

- Better outcomes in Queensland on control load tariffs
- Advocacy on a ceiling of 8 cents for electrons and 8 cents for network costs, which has been achieved in some areas
- The abolition of the Limited Merits Review in 2018, whereby companies cannot go back to the Australian Competition Tribunal to challenge the Australian Energy Regulator on their pricing path proposals
- Positive outcomes on recommendations from the 2018 Australian Competition and Consumer Commission inquiry report into retail electricity
- A class exemption to apply to businesses and independent contractors who form, or are members of, a bargaining group, and who each had an aggregated turnover of less than \$10 million in the financial year before the bargaining group was formed.

MEMBERS

- National Irrigators' Council
- National Farmers' Federation
- NSW Farmers
- QLD Farmers' Federation
- VIC Farmers
- Canegrowers
- Central Irrigation Trust
- Cotton Australia
- Pioneer Valley Water
- Bundaberg Regional Irrigators' Group
- Winemakers Federation of Australia
- Murrumbidgee Groundwater
- Dairy Australia
- Australian Grape & Wine
- Dairy Connect
- AgForce

AUSTRALIA'S FOOD & FIBRE PRODUCERS

The irrigated agriculture sector is a vital industry providing Australians with high quality locally produced food and fibre. It contributes to the social and economic wellbeing of many rural communities, to the national economy and to export income. Irrigators operate in all states and territories of Australia producing a variety of fresh and bulk foods and other commodities. Major irrigated foods include fruit and vegetables, dairy products, nuts, rice, wine, sugar, cereal grains and fodder crops for livestock production.

Australia's irrigators are among the most efficient in the world, with efficiency driven by industry innovation and investment assisted in part by government programs. For example, cotton grown in Australia is three times more water efficient than the global average. And rice grown in Australia uses 50% less water than the global average.

The 2004 National Water Initiative (NWI) set the foundation for national water reform and provided the governance foundation for water resource management in Australia. The NWI has enabled comprehensive improvement in water management throughout the Murray-Darling

Basin and Australia-wide. The NWI provides a system which was designed to manage Australia's water resources against the backdrop of current pressures due to climate change. Sustainable irrigation has made Australia a global leader with sought-after products.

Following back-to-back La Nina events and lower irrigation in 2020-21, the Total Gross Value of Irrigated Agricultural Production (GVIAP) was approximately \$15 billion. The four commodities with the highest GVIAP were*:

- Fruit and nuts (excluding grapes) at \$4.7 billion
- Vegetables at \$3.2 billion
- Dairy products at \$2.4 billion; and
- Grapes at \$1.4 billion.

Combined, these four commodities accounted for 78% of total GVIAP for the 2020-21 year. Other irrigated commodities which contribute to GVIAP*:

- Nurseries, turf and flowers \$1.3 billion
- Sugar cane \$501 million
- Cereals \$260 million
- Hay and other broadacre crops \$253 million
- Cotton \$181 million.

In 2020-21*, irrigated agriculture grew 100% of our rice, 92% of our grapes, 86% of fruit and nuts, 77% of our vegetables, 73% of our nursery and flower products, 72% of our cotton and between 40-50% of our dairy and sugarcane.

Irrigation of crops and pastures: In 2020-21*, 5.7 million megalitres were applied to crops (73% of all water applied):

- 1.3 million megalitres for cotton
- 1.1 million megalitres for fruit and nuts
- 795,400 megalitres for sugar cane
- 516,500 megalitres for grapevines.

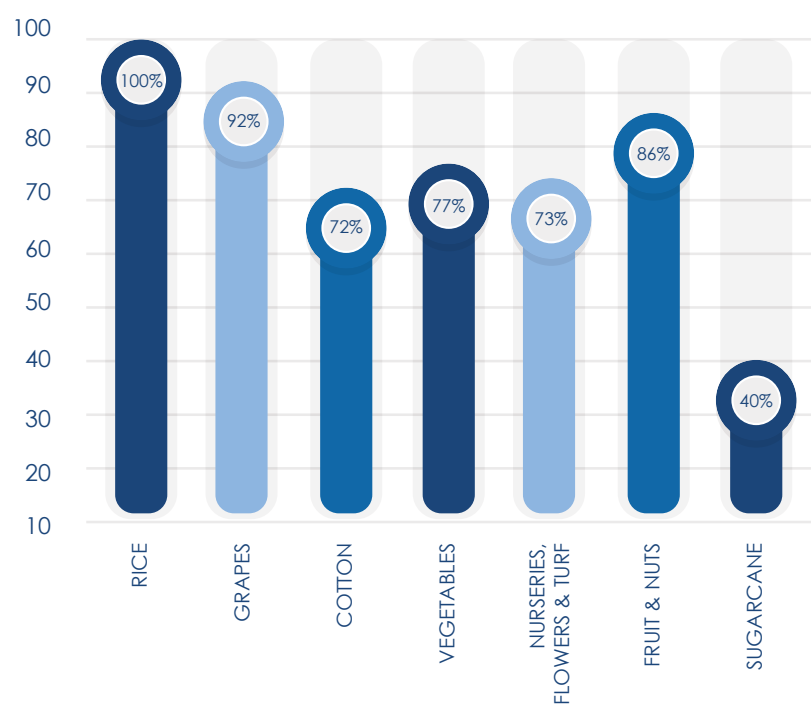
Of the 2.1 million megalitres applied to pastures (27% of all water applied):

- 1.4 million megalitres for pastures and cereals
- 664,700 megalitres for pastures and cereals cut for hay and silage.

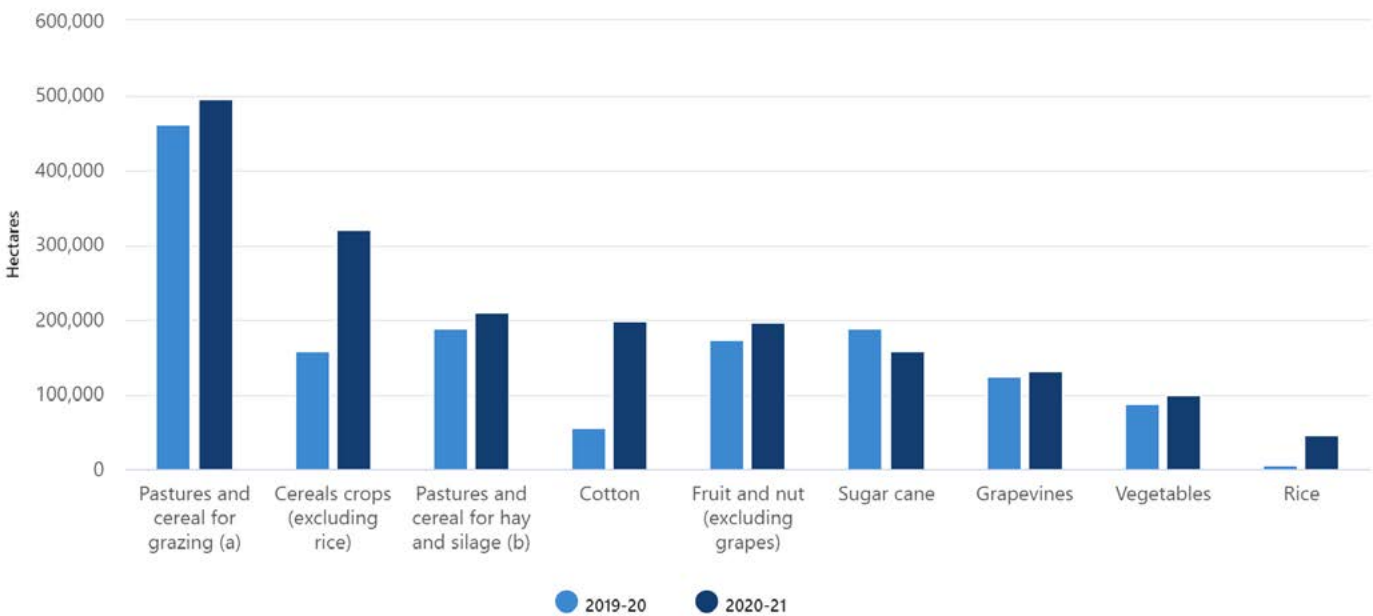
Water is the lifeblood of our food and fibre. In Australia, 90% of our daily food is grown here to the highest quality with world-class practices, including water management, and under the strictest regulations. NWI and the Murray-Darling Basin Plan (MDBP) have seen balance achieved in water planning and management. This balance has ensured Australia can grow its food and fibre, while delivering environmental and community outcomes, including for First Nations.

With both the NWI and MDBP being reviewed and with amendments likely, NIC will play a key role in helping to shape public policy by making sure the voice of the irrigated agriculture sector is heard. Water reform must not only consider environmental science and outcomes, it must also consider the social and economic science and outcomes. All Australians, including our farmers, want to see healthy rivers and wetlands. COVID-19 has however refocused our communities on being self-sufficient and able to look after ourselves now and into the future. We must continue to support the irrigated agriculture industry to protect our food security and economy. We also have a role in feeding and clothing the world, especially as they face their own climate challenges and crises into the future.

IRRIGATORS GROW AUSTRALIA'S FOOD AND FIBRE
Percentage of Australian agricultural production (by value) from irrigation



Irrigated agricultural land for selected crops and pastures, hectares*



(a) Includes both lucerne pastures and areas of cereal crops fed off
(b) Includes lucerne pastures cut for hay and silage

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Water Use on Australian Farms 2020-21 financial year

*Australian Bureau of Statistics: Water Use on Australian Farms, 2019-2020



NATIONAL IRRIGATORS' COUNCIL

Unit 8, 16 National Circuit
Barton ACT 2600

02 6273 3637

ceo@irrigators.org.au

[@Nat_Irrigators](#) | [@IDJeffrey](#)

[f](#) [@IrrigatorsCouncil](#)

www.irrigators.org.au



Designed and produced by National Irrigators' Council | Photo credits: Stock photography licensed through Adobe Stock & Freepik. In-house photography courtesy of NIC and Isaac Jeffrey.