

Thursday, 24 September 2009

Irrigators welcome Commonwealth-NSW deal

The National Irrigators' Council (NIC) has welcomed the announcement of a deal that will see the lifting of the embargo on sales of water from NSW to the Commonwealth.

NIC Chief Executive Officer, Danny O'Brien, said while the deal was a "second-best" option, it would be a relief to the many irrigators in NSW who were caught up in the embargo as they try to sell water to help survive the drought and reshape their farm businesses.

"The NIC wants to see a level playing field for all jurisdictions when it comes to water purchases and we would prefer to see all barriers to trade removed. But given this has not happened yet in Victoria, the Memorandum of Understanding between the Commonwealth and NSW is the next best thing.

"Irrigators also want to see more attention paid to investing in infrastructure upgrades to achieve water efficiencies and we look forward to the guidelines for the \$300 million On-Farm Irrigation Efficiency program being released as soon as possible.

"We do not oppose the Commonwealth's buyback of water entitlements as it will help with the transition to likely lower diversion limits under the Basin plan and is recognition of irrigators' property rights.

"We understand that state trade barriers have been a frustration for the Commonwealth as it implements its *Water for the Future* program and we congratulate the Commonwealth and Minister Wong for achieving a sensible resolution to the NSW impasse.

"We urge the Commonwealth to continue working with the states to fully remove all barriers to trade to ensure all irrigators – no matter where they are – are treated equally."

Mr O'Brien said irrigators were concerned at proposals in the MoU for the shepherding of environmental water through unregulated systems in NSW.

"Irrigators have been assured and expect that entitlements purchased by the Commonwealth will retain their original characteristics and would be very concerned if there was any special treatment for Commonwealth-owned water."

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