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Page 1 of 1

COALITION WATER POLICY – CLOSER TO THE MARK

- **Coalition water policy committed to balance and consultation**
- **MI calls for a Coalition commitment to review the Water Act**
- **MI says no to referendum on water**

Murrumbidgee Irrigation (MI) welcomed the return of some common sense in the majority of the Coalition water policy released today, but signalled concerns over a possible referendum on water.

MI's Chairman, Gillian Kirkup, commented that "today's announcement gives our communities hope that some common sense may prevail in the political debate. We have been advocating for a long time that water doesn't just impact farmers who grow the food, but equally affects the communities that support these productive regions."

If the Coalition is serious about today's commitment to reconcile the balance between social, economic and environmental concerns in the Murray-Darling Basin, they must cement this in real action.

"Commitment by the Coalition prior to August 21 to a review of the Commonwealth Water Act 2007 in which the imbalance is currently entrenched will let voters know that they are serious about getting this right for the ongoing survival and viability of communities, the environment and the ability of our nation to continue to feed its own growing population," said Mrs Kirkup.

MI welcomes the Coalition commitment to:

- achieving sustainability for the MDB rivers and equally committing to continued food and agricultural production in Basin communities
- end of delays by releasing the draft Basin Plan within two weeks of coming to office
- full and transparent public consultation on consequences of the draft Plan, including an economic and social impacts study by the Productivity Commission and ABARE
- purchase of any gap remaining between current cap levels and the new SDL's after the completion of investment and water savings programs
- an additional \$300 million for rural water infrastructure investment
- strategic approach to water buybacks
- allocating \$500 million from existing funds to develop innovative ways to secure Australia's future water supplies for productive purposes

MI also welcomes the Coalition proposal to use market solutions to solve to short term environmental water shortages. However Government must ensure that such interventions do not involve the misuse of market power and/or distortion of markets.

In this light, MI urges revisitation of institutional reform as recommended by COAG in 1994 to ensure decoupling of the roles of regulator, government advisor, environmental manager and commercial service operator most notably present in the current structure of the MDBA itself - you can't be both a player, referee and tribunal.

Although not mentioned in today's release, MI remains extremely concerned with regard to any suggestion from the Coalition of a referendum to refer water powers to the Commonwealth. Whilst we agree that the Commonwealth should have a coordinating function, we do not support States giving up their sovereign right.

Ends - For further information regarding this media release, please contact Matthew Linnegar, General Manager Corporate & Customers, Murrumbidgee Irrigation on 02 6962 0200.