

Irrigators call for immediate reset of the Water Compliance System (16/11/2017)

NSW Irrigators' Council (NSWIC) has called on the State Government to immediately invest in additional compliance measures on the ground in NSW irrigation districts to reset the NSW Water Extraction Compliance System. The NSWIC call follows yesterday's release of the State Ombudsman's Report on Water Compliance in NSW that found significant shortcomings in the management of compliance functions by Government agencies over recent years.

NSWIC CEO, Mark McKenzie, said the Ombudsman's damning report on significant compliance management shortcomings across a number of responsible Government water agencies was extremely disappointing for the irrigation sector.

"NSWIC and its Members have an absolute zero tolerance for illegal water take; we support a very stringent water compliance system; we pay millions of dollars annually in charges to support a strong system to ensure irrigators abide by their licences; and we expect that those taking water illegally will be punished to the full extent of the law. So, to now have a second report highlight significant failures in the management of those compliance functions which we have paid for but have not been effectively delivered is extremely concerning. A strong system of water take compliance is fundamental to irrigators because it secures their property rights over water, and underpins their right to use that water."

"NSWIC reiterates that there is no evidence to suggest that there is widespread non-compliance with water licence provisions by irrigators – in fact quite the opposite. The industry supports strong policing of licences, and regional irrigator bodies have been calling on the management agencies to increase the regime of meter reading and improve the turnaround times for repairs of Government owned meters. To now learn that changes in water management agencies in NSW over the last few years have meant compliance measures have been reduced is simply not acceptable. An urgent reset of the compliance system is an urgent priority."

Mr McKenzie said the recent adoption by the Government of the Matthews Inquiry recommendation to establish an independent regulatory body to manage the water compliance system was welcomed and strongly supported by the industry, but there was an urgent need to re-establish the trust of irrigators and the public that water licence compliance was being well managed and appropriate action was being taken to prevent and to investigate and punish illegal water extraction whenever it occurs. The first step would be by establishing a new baseline of water extraction data from which the new water extraction regulation system can begin.

"We are recommending to the Government that it task WaterNSW – as the on-the-ground

agency responsible for meter reading – to urgently undertake a comprehensive program of meter reading and sealing of meters, so that confidence in the system is returned and any doubts about the regularity of meter reading and meters being kept in working order can be addressed."

NSWIC restated its concern that the Ombudsman's Report also pointed to the fact that irrigators' were not getting the compliance system they were paying for and fully expected, but the industry would work with the Government and the new Independent Regulator to make sure that the water licence compliance system was beyond reproach. ENDS.

Further Information:

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