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NSW Election Policy Manifest

Election – March 2019

Response Form



DETAILED ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

GENERAL

Political Approach to Irrigation Farming

Comment:

The NSW Liberal and Nationals recognise how important irrigation farmers are to regional economies. At a national economy level, irrigation farmers are critical to Australia and NSW export markets for food and fibre. At a local economy level, both within and outside the basin, the turnover of irrigation farming businesses is critical to regional towns' prosperity. This is why the NSW Liberal and Nationals believe in a triple bottom line approach, water is critical to regional communities, farmers and the environment.

Policy Consistency

Comment:

The NSW Liberals and Nationals acknowledge that our irrigation farmers and their communities, have shouldered the heavy load of reform, through the Basin Plan and the recent Water Reform Action Plan. We are committed to working with irrigation farmers across the state in the finalisation of these crucial reforms to create social and economic certainty for our regions. This includes a focus on the importance of property rights for our farmers as well as delivering a triple bottom line approach that demonstrates environmental outcomes achieved with the water recovered.

MURRAY DARLING BASIN PLAN

Murray Darling Basin Plan

Comment:

The NSW Liberals and Nationals have strongly pursued a triple bottom line outcome in our dealings under the Basin Plan. We were strong advocates for our Northern Basin communities in fighting for the Northern Basin Review, we were strong advocates for our southern communities in fighting for the SDL Adjustment Mechanism. In December, we secured a rigorous socio-economic test which will ensure that no more productive water will be ripped out of our communities unless it can be proved without a doubt that doing so will not produce a negative outcome.

While the NSW Liberals and Nationals have strong track record on this front, we know that there are many more challenges ahead of us in the implementation phase of the Basin Plan. We are committed to delivering the Menindee Lakes project, which is critical to keeping productive water in the Southern Basin, while delivering water for the environment and easing one of the biggest constraints in the Basin.

SDL Adjustment Mechanism

Comment:

The NSW Liberals and Nationals are committed to water savings projects, to make the most of the available water, while not allowing our communities to suffer through the harmful socio-economic impacts of buybacks. We have consulted on these projects and we know that we must deliver them in a way which delivers the best environmental, social and economic outcomes for the whole state. The NSW Liberals and Nationals strongly oppose further buybacks and will continue to work with our communities to deliver water saving projects.

Metering

Comment:

The NSW Liberals and Nationals are committed to a strong and robust metering system in NSW. Part of this policy is ensuring that it is easy and affordable for water users to comply with the 'no meter no pump' policy. We are committed to bringing water users up to the Australian Standard of metering over the next four years and have made the Farm Innovation Fund available to deliver low interest loans for this purpose. We will continue to work with industry to make the implementation of this system practical for all water users.

Menindee Lakes Project and efficiency infrastructure

Comment:

The NSW Liberals and Nationals are committed to delivering a Menindee Water Savings that both benefits the local community and the state as a whole. Delivering the Menindee Water Savings project is critical to reducing water loss within the basin, easing constraints and delivering environmental outcomes. Failure to deliver the project would allow the Commonwealth Government to step in and buy 106GL of productive water from the Southern Basin. We know how important the Menindee lakes are to the local community and will be regularly talking with them throughout the design and delivery of this project.

Effectiveness of Environmental Water

Comment:

The NSW Liberals and Nationals are committed to ensuring that all environmental water, both planned and held is used in a way that achieves environmental objectives. We know the important role that a healthy environment plays in strong regional communities. We are committed to transparency of environmental objectives and outcomes resulting from the use of environmental water. This also means making sure that we maximise the use of environmental water in the system to assist in the reduction of water losses and as a delivery tool for water managers.

Salinity Targets

Comment:

The Productivity Commission noted salinity targets are mostly being met in the Basin. We will continue to support the Basin Salinity Management Strategy 2030, with Morgan as the official assessment point for Murray river salinity and a target of 800EC or below.

WATER OPERATIONS

Water Operations and Constraints Management

Comment:

The NSW Liberals and Nationals are committed to developing the Constraints Management Strategy, and the Pre-requisite Policy Measures, in a way which ensures that property rights remain sacrosanct.

We do not support compulsory acquisition of private property to implement the constraints strategy. We will continue to ensure that river capacity is shared equally between NSW and Victoria and the continuation of the Border Rivers Commission.

Water Charges

Comment:

The NSW Liberals and Nationals remain committed to greater transparency in water management including the way charges are applied and will continue to work with IPART to provide greater clarity as to what is determined in setting costs in NSW. As for the MDBA costs, the NSW Liberals and Nationals will remain strong advocates for the MDBA to provide greater transparency on what costs our farmers are paying.

Energy Pricing

Comment:

The NSW Government recently opened applications for grants as part of the \$30 million Regional Community Energy Program. This program is providing assistance to regional communities to increase renewable energy generation, improve energy security and help communities to save money on electricity bills. Under this program, projects that will convert off-grid communities to grid-connected supply are eligible and renewable gas projects also fall within the eligibility criteria.

NSW is committed to removing regulatory barriers to ensure better protections and access to more competitive retail offers for consumers in embedded networks and stand-alone power systems. There are reviews of the regulatory frameworks for embedded networks and stand-alone power systems currently underway. This work is being undertaken by the Australian Energy Market Commission.

NSW has also developed a number of educational resources to help consumers understand how they can participate in clean energy and energy efficiency programs which are available online.

The NSW Liberals and Nationals have also committed \$55 million for the Emerging Energy Program, which will co-fund new clean large-scale energy projects like batteries and pumped hydro that can provide on-demand energy and help bring down energy prices for households and businesses.

Sale of Snowy Hydro

Comment:

Water security is a priority investment area for the proceeds of the sale of Snowy Hydro under the NSW Liberals & Nationals. The \$4.2 billion Snowy Hydro Legacy Fund will invest in regional dams, pipelines and weirs, as well as projects that reduce evaporation and seepage in priority catchments. Projects supported by the Snowy Hydro Legacy Fund include \$650 million to raise the wall of the Wyangala Dam, new and replacement weirs at Walgett, Gin Gin and Wilcannia, as well as new pipelines from Lake Rowlands to Carcoar, and Hunter Water to Singleton.

Floodplain Harvesting / Overland Flows

Comment:

The NSW Liberals and Nationals are committed to accounting for water taken through overland flows as well as licensing this take. We are currently undertaking a technical review of the policy to ensure that all stakeholders have confidence in the policy. We understand the importance of overland flows to farmers as well as the necessity to ensure that all water take is accounted for.

Embargoes

Comment:

The NSW Liberals and Nationals are working towards a water management system in the state that will mean that embargoes are no longer needed. We recently passed legislation to look for alternative environmental water protections including active management and Individual Daily Extraction Limits. We understand that embargoes are a blunt instrument and will continue to work with all stakeholders to find a more equitable way of sharing flows into the future.

The NSW Liberals and Nationals understand the uncertainty that is created by the use of embargoes and want to work with the community to develop water management so that we can achieve social cultural and economic objectives in the future without the need for embargoes.

WATER SECURITY

Drought Policy

Comment:

In response to devastatingly dry conditions, the NSW Liberals & Nationals have made close to \$1.5 billion dollars in drought support available to help farmers through this very difficult time. This including long-term low interest loans for farmers to invest in efficiency-improving infrastructure through the Farm Innovation Fund, as well as Drought Transport Subsidies and more funding into mental health. We know tough times are likely to continue, and if there is more to be done to support our farming communities, we step in.

We have also committed to increase the Farm Innovation Fund from \$650 million to \$1 billion and to further strengthen our drought package to include:

- an additional \$5 million for emergency water supplies to ensure towns have access to safe and reliable water;
- increasing the amount farmers can claim on Drought Transport Subsidies from \$30,000 to \$40,000; and
- an additional \$2 million to connect people to support services through the Rural Resilience Program.

Research and Development specific to irrigation

Comment:

The NSW Liberals and National are committed to ensuring that all of our farmers are as productive and efficient as possible. We note that there are pre-existing Research Development Corporations for many of irrigation farming industries, including Cotton and Grain RDCs and the broader Rural Industries RDC. We are committed to work with NSWIC or other industry policy to progress any proposal for an irrigation-specific CRC.

OTHER

Public perception of the irrigation farming sector

Comment:

The NSW Liberals and Nationals remain committed to our farmers and will continue to promote all industries including working with industry, major grocery outlets and other groups involved in the agriculture industry to better educate and inform the general public on the importance of irrigation to food and fibre production.

Greater capacity for Aboriginal policy and advocacy, particularly relating to cultural water

Comment:

The NSW Liberals and Nationals support Aboriginal nations and their role in water management in NSW and the Murray-Darling Basin. At Ministerial Council last year, we Nationals supported the addition of an MDBA Board Member to represent aboriginal interests.

Mining / Coal Seam Gas

Comment:

NSW currently has the most stringent CSG rules in the nation. In 2014, the NSW Government introduced the NSW Gas Plan, based on recommendations by the NSW Chief Scientist & Engineer. The Gas Plan provides a clear, strategic framework to deliver world's best practice standards and regulation for the Coal Seam Gas (CSG) industry. When Labor was in charge they issued exploration licences like confetti. Under Labor there were 58 licences allowing CSG exploration, covering 60% of the State. Since the NSW Liberals and Nationals have been in government, 37 of these have been cancelled and not a single licence has been issued. Exploration licences now cover less than 7% of the State. We have also introduced additional regulations to ensure that our water, agricultural land and critical industries are protected.

ANY ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

The NSW Liberals & Nationals are the only political parties who have stood by the irrigation industry in good times and bad. Labor and the Greens have made it clear they support compulsory buy-backs and moving water management to an environmental portfolio, while the other minor parties will promise a 'quick fix', knowing they will never be able to deliver anything. We are happy to be judged on our actions not on our words.

**Please consider submitting an attributable quote in support of
NSW Irrigation Farming.**