

MEDIA RELEASE

The 'How' and 'Why' of Water Infrastructure

8 July 2019

"Tonight's Four Corners programs has demonstrated a clear misunderstanding of Water Infrastructure Programs under the Murray Darling Basin Plan" said CEO of the NSW Irrigators' Council, Luke Simpkins.

"In every valley in the Basin, there is a set limit on the amount of water that can be used (extracted) for farming. If the amount of water used on one farm increases from the purchase of water, the amount used on another farm must decrease from the sale of water".

The cap on the amount of water used by farmers has been in place for over 20 years. The fundamental purpose of the Murray Darling Basin Plan is to further reduce this cap to a more sustainable level – known as the Sustainable Diversion Limit.

Infrastructure programs, as well as buybacks, are the key mechanisms by which the government purchases water rights from irrigators for the environment. The difference between an infrastructure programs, and a buy-backs programs, is that the money paid for the water right must be invested in improving the water use efficiency of the irrigation farmers' property.

"Infrastructure programs require irrigation farmers to hand water back to the Government before the project starts. These programs result in real water being returned to the environment. The water register allows information on the amount of water transacted to the environment to be documented transparently. Projects are audited and undergo heavy scrutiny, with the funds administered by delivery partners – not irrigation farmers."

The infrastructure programs were designed to, and have been effective in, returning water to the environment, whilst at the same time preserving jobs and the vital economic activity that keeps country towns, supporting businesses and communities alive.

To date, efficiency programs have returned over 640 billion litres of water to the environment, and at the same time resulted in irrigation farmers improving their water use efficiency. In the case of the Murrumbidgee, 262 billion litres of water is returned to the environment each year, whilst also maintaining the immense socio-economic value of the sector in this region.

“In comparison to direct buy-backs, infrastructure projects achieve environmental outcomes whilst facilitating the transition of communities and the irrigation industry to food and fibre production with less water.”

“The infrastructure projects provide a pathway to a sustainable future for food and fibre production, whilst simultaneously facilitating a healthy river system for generations to come”.

We cannot forget that this Four Corners program comes amidst a devastating drought, where most irrigation farmers in NSW simply do not have access to any water at all (0% general-security water allocation).”

For further information:

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Approved JC/TN