

MDBA MOVE ON REGIONAL ENGAGEMENT A 'NO BRAINER'

(12 August 2016)

NSW Irrigators Council (NSWIC) has described as a “no brainer” the announcement by the Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) that it will appoint Regional Engagement personnel across the Basin as a part of a decentralisation of the Authority, designed to better engage with Basin communities.

NSWIC has welcomed the move as an overdue recognition by the MDBA that it is very hard to successfully engage with local communities while ever the Authority is seen as isolated in Canberra, too far from the people affected by the Basin Plan and separated from its impacts.

NSWIC CEO, Mark McKenzie, said the Council hoped that the decentralisation of the MDBA would extend beyond local liaison with Basin communities, and would include the relocation of parts of the Authority to regional centres, to better integrate the Authority into the regional ‘fabric’ of the Basin.

“For example, we see no reason why the MDBA River Operations group should not be relocated to a major centre away from Canberra, such as Albury, where the MDBA predecessor the Murray Darling Basin Commission was based, or Mildura, close to the junction of the Murray and Darling, central to the 3 southern Basin States, and on the pivot between the Northern and Southern Basin.”

Mr McKenzie said other Authority management groups such as the teams evaluating and monitoring the social and economic impacts of the Plan in the Northern and Southern Basin regions should logically be regionally located to have on-the-ground experience of the Plan’s local impacts across the Basin. However NSWIC believes the refocussing of the Authority should go further and include a full review of its future functions and structure.

“The MDBA has been built into a huge additional water bureaucracy in Canberra to run functions that logically can be farmed back to the States. All the Authority’s functions should be thoroughly reviewed to remove unnecessary duplication between the MDBA and State water agencies, and with the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder as the manager of the Federal Government’s environmental water holdings. The Authority is currently facing a ‘fiscal cliff’ of insufficient forward budget allocations beyond 2017 to run the 350 strong organisation, so now is a perfect opportunity to refocus and refit the Authority. It is very difficult to see why such a large organisation will be still be required beyond 2019 when the Basin Plan is locked in.”

Mr McKenzie said the Council welcomed the announcement of the Government prior to the last election that it would review Federal water agencies – including the MDBA – and NSWIC looked forward to the commencement of that review.

ENDS.

Approved: TG / MM

Media contacts:

Mark McKenzie 0412 075 245