

FEDERAL OPPOSITION MUST PULL BASIN PLAN BACK FROM THE BRINK

(3/05/2018)

NSW Irrigators Council (NSWIC) has called on the Federal Opposition to vote against a Greens Disallowance Motion on a key component of the Murray Darling Basin Plan due for debate in the Senate next Tuesday (May 8). The Council has urged Opposition Leader Bill Shorten and other key Labor leaders, including Shadow Water Minister, Tony Burke, and Opposition Leader in the Senate, Penny Wong, to ensure Labor Senators vote down the Disallowance Motion to avoid the Basin Plan completely unravelling.

The Greens want to vote out a key component of the Basin Plan that would implement works and measures across the southern Basin designed to reduce water losses, and to deliver water more efficiently to icon environmental sites. The four State Basin Governments and the Commonwealth approved the 37 projects for implementation by 2024, after a Murray Darling Basin Authority assessment confirmed the projects could deliver 605 gigalitres (GL) of savings. The prospect of these projects being voted out of the Plan means the central plank negotiated by NSW and Victoria, which assured their support, could now be scrapped – leaving the Plan on the brink of total collapse.

NSWIC CEO, Mark McKenzie said no one should think that Victoria and NSW are bluffing, and will not withdraw.

“Both States are adamant that if the 605GL of projects are disallowed and the Commonwealth was forced to purchase the water out of irrigated agriculture instead, the severity of the economic consequences for communities in Northern Victoria and Inland NSW would be disastrous, and will not be contemplated. They will immediately withdraw from the Basin Plan and it will remain only partly implemented with no hope of revival in the foreseeable future!”

Mr McKenzie said the Greens and the Opposition would be responsible for the death of the Plan.

“The stakes are exceedingly high if the Disallowance Motion is successful. Rather than securing more environmental water for SA, the Plan will be stopped dead in its tracks and the 2106GL of water recovered for additional environmental flows to date will be the total - there will be no more!”

“Irrigators have disagreed with some components of the Plan – but this package represents a workable way to achieve the environmental objectives while minimising the destruction of the economic and social fabric of many Basin communities. We believe the alternative pathway of far

greater volumes of water being recovered from irrigators, as advocated by the Greens, will not be supported and will not succeed. So, after five years of hard slog in negotiating the way through to reach agreement, and huge pain and uncertainty for Basin communities, the future of the Basin Plan is now absolutely at the crossroads.”

“Only the Federal Opposition can fix this, by returning to a bi-partisan approach that respects the previous agreements of the Basin States and successive Federal Governments. Labor Senators must join with the Government to vote down this disastrous Disallowance Motion next Tuesday,” Mr McKenzie said.

ENDS

For further information:

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Approved RS / TN