

Level 5, 491 Kent Street,  
Sydney NSW 2000

PO Box Q640,  
Queen Victoria Building NSW 1230



Tel: 02 9264 3848  
nswic@nswic.org.au  
www.nswic.org.au

ABN: 49 087 281 746

## MEDIA RELEASE

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### **Regional stability no longer priority for Labor**

**15/02/2019**

The Labor Party's announcement yesterday that they will remove the cap on buybacks under the Basin Plan will risk the stability of regional communities, according to NSW Irrigators' Council.

NSWIC Chief Executive, Luke Simpkins said the announcement was a significant policy shift by Labor who had previously supported the cap and a bipartisan approach to implementing the Basin Plan.

"In making the announcement, Tony Burke acknowledged the cap was there to provide some certainty for communities," Mr Simpkins said.

"He is talking about fundamentally shifting the goalposts that communities have been relying on, irrespective of the consequences for those communities.

"Labor wants to give the MDBA flexibility to claw more water out of productive agriculture as a result of future reviews that have not yet taken place and have not yet found if more water is needed.

"We don't have a crystal ball, but what we do know is that recent reviews by the MDBA, the Productivity Commission and even the SA Royal Commission have found that the loss of water and resulting reduction in production causes social and economic destruction in rural Australia, and particularly NSW."

NSWIC is advocating for the development of a Socio-Economic Impact Assessment framework (SEIA) to be applied to all current and future water reforms and reported through a Rural Communities Impact Statement similar to the current requirements for Environmental Impact Assessments.

"By applying this level of transparency, we can move away from partisan politics and accusations of chasing votes in South Australia or Broken Hill," Mr Simpkins said.

“By adopting a Rural Communities Impact Statement, then if political parties decide 5, 50, 500 or more jobs lost for every gigalitre taken from farmers is the price they want to pay, the facts that underwrite that decision are open to all.

“The problem with the current state of play is that talk is cheap, but the impact is actually very expensive.

“The livelihoods of people in regional communities, not just the irrigation farmers, but also supporting business and industries, regional hospitals, schools, sporting clubs and the like, are all impacted by policy that starts as cheap talk but ends in a loss of production,” he said.

NSWIC calls upon politicians to have the courage of their convictions and announce what the costs of their proposals will be and not just announce the easy headlines. ENDS

For further information:

Luke Simpkins – CEO NSW Irrigators’ Council

0410 976 919

Approved JC/TN