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MEDIA RELEASE

Irrigation farmers in the clear

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The Natural Resource Access Regulator (NRAR) has cleared irrigation farmers falsely accused of illegally accessing water in the Namoi Valley last week, which left numerous irrigation farmers frustrated by the media's reporting of the issue and the public's quick misinformed judgements.

NRAR this week issued a media release explaining they "detected no specific incidents of non-compliance with the embargo".[1]

CEO of the NSW Irrigators' Council Luke Simpkins said the release vindicated farmers who had been frustrated by the public's and the media's quick judgements based on misinformation.

"The truth is, even before the official embargo was announced, Namoi Water recommended a voluntary embargo - this means that farmers, through their own good will, determined to let the first flush of rain amidst the devastating drought go through the system," he said.

"The way the media spun what truly is a good news story of irrigation farmers looking after the environment is a disgrace, but an accurate reflection of the current extent of false claims and prejudicial assumptions surrounding the actions of our farmers."

"We take water theft very seriously, and industry has a zero-tolerance policy to water theft."

"We also take the bullying and harassment of our irrigation farmers, and the impacts on their mental health and well-being, incredibly seriously. These are real people, with families and feelings, who are already doing it so tough."

NRAR chief investigator Grant Barnes said, "My staff advised of no breaches of the embargo had been detected".[2]

“Most water users follow the rules and meet requirements, and I think the level of compliance we are seeing over the course of this campaign is very encouraging and says a lot about the willingness of water users to comply,” Mr Barnes said.[3]

Namoi Water, Executive Officer, Jon Maree Baker responded, "We're very pleased to see Grant Barnes come out and make the statement that there has been no pumping or breaches during the embargo."

“In this case the issue should have really been a good news story for Namoi irrigation farmers who did undertake a voluntary embargo.”

CEO, Luke Simpkins, said “Environmental health and sustainable resource access are fundamental to irrigation farmers. This is one of many instances where irrigation farmers make huge contributions towards their local environments. We only hope the public will recognise that.”

He said the correction of the facts doesn't mend the heart ache of farmers who faced an onslaught of attacks and bullying from the public via social media after the false allegations were made.

“Our farmers are globally recognised for their water efficiency and their sustainable practices but the current sentiment towards irrigation farmers is heart-breaking.”

“As our farmers continue to battle one of the worst droughts in history, they should not have to worry about bullying and harassment from the very people they feed and clothe.”

For Further Information:

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[1] Natural Resource Access Regulator (9 April 2019)

<https://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/media/releases/2019/nsw-water-regulator-encouraged-by-response-to-embargo-in-states-west>

[2] Sourced from ABC News: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2019-04-10/namoi-valley-irrigators-in-the-clear/10987200>

[3] Natural Resource Access Regulator (9 April 2019)

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