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MEDIA RELEASE

Environmental Water has Priority

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Environmental health and sustainable resource access are core principles of NSW Irrigators' Council, and the irrigation farming community.

The CEO of the NSW Irrigators' Council Luke Simpkins, said "environmental health is so important to irrigation farmers, and that is why our irrigation farmers fully respect the water allocation framework whereby environmental needs must be met well before any water is made available to farmers".

"Water management has a strict order of priority for who gets water first – critical human need is first, then the environment, and only after all those needs are met do farmers get any allocation."

"In some valleys, such as the Barwon-Darling, 94% of flows are reserved for the environment and only 6% is available for irrigation farmers."

"As an industry, we must take responsibility and the initiative to ensure people are aware that farmers are not in competition with the environment for scarce water resources – the environment gets what it needs first, *then* if there is anything left, it can be available for farmers".

"Environmental water must be used most effectively and transparently and remain focused on achieving positive ecological outcomes for our river systems".

"A concern we all share, is the risk that environmental water gets used for political or strategic opportunity, rather than the positive ecological outcomes our river systems need, which irrigation farmers have been working tirelessly for".

"This season has been tough for us all, but despite many farmers having no access to water, our irrigation community has continued to actively support and fund improvements to the health of our river systems."

We have tremendous examples of farmers environmental stewardship - protecting biodiversity, providing drought refuges for wildlife, and in conserving native species. Our

irrigation farmers in NSW and Australia always practice high ethical and environmental standards in managing water.

Today's announcement by the Murray Darling Basin Authority on their environmental water priorities is of course supported, however their 'rolling, multi-year priorities' demonstrate the need for real environmental outcomes, not political box ticking. The Murray Darling Basin Plan was never meant to drought proof the Basin, therefore the key should be actual science-backed outcomes and specific identified volumes to achieve those outcomes.

When fresh water is particularly short, the MDBA's 'freshwater connectivity to the Coorong and the Murray Mouth' is merely a political outcome at odds to any real environmental objective. Similarly, the erosion and damage to the Barmah-Millewa Forest they did last season with their notorious 'overbank transfers', was about pushing water through without regard for obvious capacity restraints.

Reduced water for farming results in lower crop production and increased costs for food for the Australian people. If Australian people are going to pay more out of their pay packets to put food on the table, they have a right to expect real environmental outcomes from this MDBA.

For further information:

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Approved JC/TN