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## MEDIA RELEASE

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# Inspector-General for the Basin welcomed, but he can't make it rain

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The NSW Irrigators' Council (NSWIC) welcomes today's announcement of a new Inspector-General position to oversee integrity in the Murray-Darling Basin, and put an end to baseless allegations, propagation of myths & the outright falsehoods being peddled by anti-farming interests.

We expect the Inspector-General will be the voice of reason and truth which industry has been calling for after years of unrelenting false allegations and agenda-driven myths.

Industry has been calling for this kind of oversight to foster the integrity, transparency and accountability of Basin water management for some time, as these are key principles which our industry values in highest regards.

Today's announcement is a win for our farmers who need the Government to step in, quash the sensationalist false claims, and restore public confidence in the integrity of the system.

There are a small number of fringe groups trying to perpetuate the idea that water-management is a basket-case and that water theft is common, in a bid to increase water recovery from farmers – this is simply not correct, and we must stick to the facts.

As the recent abhorrent 4 Corners program demonstrated, there is a clear agenda by certain groups looking to manipulate a lack of public understanding in the complexity of water legislation, to undermine confidence in our farmers and this state's system of water management.

In recent times, there has been an overhaul to the way water is managed in the Basin & particularly in NSW. As a state, we now lead the rest of the Basin in water administration, which is not properly acknowledged due to the impacts of the drought.

NSW now has the strongest water management & compliance regime in the country & we hope the new Inspector-General position will raise the standards of the other states too.

In NSW, we have seen the establishment of the Natural Resources Access Regulator (NRAR) as ‘water police’, upgraded metering framework, and ongoing water recovery (shifting water from farmers to the environment) to name just a few measures – as demanded by industry in good-faith.

It’s not perfect & there remains more work to be done on improving the Basin, but we hope this step of creating an Inspector-General will bring the public closer to having confidence in the significant work and achievements already in place, so that the critical work of continuing to improve outcomes in the Basin can continue without being stalled by the plentiful falsehoods.

### **Further Information:**

#### ***Water Theft and maladministration***

The agricultural industry has zero tolerance for water theft, and firmly stand by the need for transparency and due diligence in the administration of water management.

The fact remains that water theft is a rare occurrence as can be seen on the Public Register<sup>1</sup> Those found guilty of water theft should face the full force of the law, but the remainder of the industry, must be distinguished from the actions of others.

Whilst the new Inspector-General role is welcomed, it must be noted that this is in addition to the very strong compliance system now in place in NSW (the strongest compliance system of any state in the Basin). NRAR (the ‘water police’), have a very strong presence, and use satellite technology to comprehensively monitor water use.

#### ***Water recovery and delivery of water efficiency projects***

Improvements to public confidence in the integrity of the Basin Plan is needed to ensure the Plan will be delivered by 2024, and that is critical for the environment, and farmers alike.

NSWIC does not believe that the Basin Plan itself, nor implementation of the Basin Plan is perfect, but we recognise that it is a unique, bi-partisan, and world-leading agreement that is the product of a long process of negotiations and compromises, and that must be respected.

The Basin Plan is only 7 years into the 12-year Plan. Already, 20% of water extraction by farmers has ceased and is now used for environmental benefits. The Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder has used more than 9,000 billion litres of water for environmental watering events.

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<sup>1</sup> See NRAR Public Register, available here: <https://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/natural-resources-access-regulator/reports-data>

In July, leading water scientists said in an open letter:

*“It bears mentioning that of the many large transboundary water basins in the world grappling with water scarcity and conflict between users, only the Murray-Darling Basin has a strong rules-based order, including clearly defined water entitlements, a sustainable cap on extractions, a large environmental water reserve and a systematic audit process. When it comes to the complicated business of sharing water between competing interests, basin managers from around the world rightly look to Australia for guidance.”*

### **Drought**

NSWIC hope that the Inspector-General position may assist to distinguish between the devastating impacts of severe drought and any allegation of maladministration or illegal activity.

We are amidst a devastating drought which is now the worst on record. There has been less than 1% of typical inflows into the Basin<sup>2</sup>, and that is causing dire impacts throughout the entire system.

Water management becomes difficult when there’s not much water to manage.

### **Concluding remarks**

NSWIC hopes the announcement today will be a significant step to restoring confidence in the system which is in place, and provide a voice of reason to dispel popular falsehoods which may make a novel news story but only set-back the Basin from seeing any real improvements.

We also stress the impact of the drought on all farmers, but particularly irrigation farmers, for whom this continues to be an extremely stressful time & whose plight can only be relieved by widespread rain which we all hope comes soon.

NSWIC acknowledges the statement by Minister Littleproud that: *“This announcement has been in train for months and is entirely unrelated to Four Corners’ biased reporting on Basin Plan matters”*.

For further information:

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<sup>2</sup> According to Water NSW.