

MEDIA RELEASE

NSWIC Response to NSW's Threat to Withdraw from the Basin Plan

25 November 2019

NSW Irrigators' Council (NSWIC) is concerned that Deputy Premier John Barilaro has again repeated his threat to withdraw from the Basin Plan. Since 2012 irrigation farmers have carried the burden of the Plan with the negative impact on food and crop production across NSW. Now is the time for the NSW Government to get their proposed supply and constraint projects undertaken as their share of the Basin Plan.

"The heavy lifting from NSW irrigation farmers under the Basin Plan has been devastating, but it has all but finished. Water recovery is complete in almost every valley, and we are now complying with the Sustainable Diversion Limits."

"What is remaining under the Basin Plan is for the NSW Government to do their share – and that involves implementing a range of projects to achieve further Basin Plan objectives."

"If NSW walk away now, it will be a slap in the face for our irrigation communities who have given up so much to see their Government aren't able to do their part."

"What is most concerning is that this move is being presented as in the interests of our irrigation sector. We ask the Deputy Premier to demonstrate how this would bring any real benefits to our sector, and not place us in enormous risk of future reform."

"If NSW walks away now, many of the concerns our farmers have will not change:

- There will be no more water available for farmers;
- The water already recovered under the Basin Plan will not return, as that water is now owned by environmental water holders;
- The sharing arrangements of water between states would not change as that is determined in separate intergovernmental agreements that pre-date the Basin Plan;
- It would not fix the water market challenges nor affect the current high water prices, as the market and market operations are also separate from the Basin Plan.

"We welcome any politician who wants the best possible outcomes for the irrigation sector, but that must be through smart policy, not as a disguise for the Government trying to avoid lifting their weight."

"The NSW Government projects which are required to be implemented for NSW to meet the Basin Plan requirements are crucial to minimising the social and economic impacts of the Basin Plan in the Southern Basin. The projects aim to achieve environmental outcomes with less water, thereby reducing the impact on farmers and communities".

“The problem is that the projects have been poorly designed, and thus lack the support from many communities.”

“If we want a certain water future, the last thing we want is to start from scratch – we need flexibility and adaptability to get these projects right and get them in place.”

“The actions of Barilaro should be seen as very high risk for our industry. If the NSW Government were serious about protecting irrigation farmers, they would have intervened before the 30% reduction in water occurred, and not just when it is their turn to do their part.”

For further information:

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Approved JC/BB