

## MEDIA RELEASE

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# NSWIC Welcomes Announcement to Investigate Systemic Underusage of Irrigation Water

28/11/2019

NSW Irrigators' Council (NSWIC) strongly welcomes today's announcement by Minister Littleproud, to respond to a trend of irrigation farmers using well below their maximum limit.

NSWIC has been calling on both state and federal government to address the issue through Water Sharing Plans, and our irrigation community are pleased that the Minister has taken this issue seriously.

CEO of NSWIC, Luke Simpkins, said "underusage has become a systemic problem, and is a lost opportunity where Australian farmers could otherwise produce more food and fibre, and support their regional communities and businesses who are struggling to endure this worst drought on record."

"The total extent of under-utilisation is about 2000GLs – the equivalent of 4 Sydney Harbours, or 800,000 Olympic size swimming pools."<sup>1</sup>

In NSW a limit on the amount of water irrigation farmers can use has been in place for over 20 years, first through the Murray Darling Basin Cap, then through lower limits imposed by Water Sharing Plans, and then those limits were further reduced to the Sustainable Diversion Limit (SDL) in July this year, as a core part of the Basin Plan.

"The water available to farmers has reduced by 28% in recent times from a range of reforms. This represents less food and other crops produced for Australian families and for trade."

"If there are further impediments to our farmers using the legal limits beyond this, and within the share of water for agriculture which is determined as sustainable, then those impediments must be addressed."

"Removing impediments in Water Sharing Plans that restrain water use by farmers will be critical to helping our farmers get back on their feet and recover from this drought, and the already big hit of recent reforms."

"Underusage is primarily due to restrictive rules (in Water Sharing Plans) which constrain the amount of water available to irrigation - it is NOT primarily due to irrigation farmers not using their full allocation."

"This is simply about ensuring the water, that is meant to be provided for food and crop production, can be used by our farmers, for the benefit of Australian families."

It is critical that both the MDBA and the NSW Government make the rule changes in Water Sharing Plans that will improve the uptake of water within the allowable bucket for food and fibre production.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.mdba.gov.au/publications/mdba-reports/transitional-sdl-water-take-reports>