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## MEDIA RELEASE

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# **NSW Should not go from Flow to Woe**

## **19/02/2020**

Recent rainfall in the Northern NSW/Southern Queensland has brought promise to many communities in the Murray-Darling Basin, with WaterNSW now forecasting that larger flows will reach the Menindee Lakes.

“It is important that these flows can get downstream, and provide much needed relief to the high priority needs along the Darling and other areas, but a priority of government must be restoring water sharing arrangements to get the whole system back on its feet.” said NSW Irrigators’ Council CEO Luke Simpkins.

“Water sharing laws outline the flow targets for how much water is required to make it downstream - yet those laws have been suspended.”

“Our irrigation community has respected this short-term measure which represented the most comprehensive protection of inflows ever applied, but suspending laws is never a long term solution, and it is disappointing that the Department have not sought to quickly reinstate the rules.”

The NSW Minister for Water Resources is no longer responsible for flow targets, as that responsibility was handed to Departmental bureaucrats in 2018. Questions are now being asked why water sharing laws remain suspended, while an opaque set of numbers do not address the confidence issues of farmers and water users.

The NSW Department has identified that usual water sharing arrangements will not resume until 60GL to 70GL of water gets to Lake Wetherell.

“We have water sharing laws that outline targets, and those targets were developed by hydrologists with the best-available science. There is a clear need for officials to show farmers their figures.”

“No one is disputing the need for water to get to struggling towns and those whose livelihoods depend on the flows, in fact I think everyone would support that need. However, there is concern when Officials don’t share the rationale behind their decision making. The point must be made that the drought is not over and potentially it may not rain in the North for some time, and that would be a tragedy if the NSW officials sacrifice northern farmers with their decision making.”

“More information is desperately needed on how these flows are being managed. We have farmers all across NSW who can see water but have not been permitted to touch it. We need to know whether these flows can contribute towards the Murray shared resource to get an

allocation to our farmers at the bottom of the state, and we need to know whether these flows can assist our farmers at the top of the state to recover from drought too.”

Water sharing arrangements provide certainty to all our communities on how such a precious resource is shared, but decision-making behind closed doors which goes against current laws, is deeply concerning.

We support the publication of minutes from bureaucrats that has informed this decision-making process.

The role of Queensland is also important to consider – as the state at the top of the Murray Darling Basin, Queensland has an important role in ensuring enough water makes it way down to drought impacted communities in NSW. Queensland hasn’t taken measures as significant as NSW to protect flows.

“We want our river systems managed based on the laws, not closed doors.”

For further information:

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