

MEDIA RELEASE

Irrigation Farmers are Feeding Australia

27/03/2020

It was reported this week, that NSW Deputy Premier John Barilaro has urged the Federal Government to take immediate action to allow southern irrigators to access water for the nation's food security.

CEO of the NSW Irrigators' Council (NSWIC), Luke Simpkins, responded saying "Irrigation farmers in Australia are the reason our community can have confidence in our food security, but we must support them to ensure that can continue into the future."

"The Murray Darling Basin produces one-third of Australia's food supply."

"However, a series of recent reforms, including (but not just) the Basin Plan, have seen up to 28% of the water once available for farmers to grow food, no longer available. This is the equivalent of removing 1 in every 3.5 litres of water from our farmers."

"It is hard to grow food without water."

"We agree utterly that there is currently no shortage of food in Australia, and Australians do not need to panic buy, but we need to acknowledge the role of our irrigation sector in allowing us to have that confidence, and we need to take active steps to ensure we can continue to have this confidence into the future."

"Managing water for the environment is important, and something our sector respects, but we need to find the point of balance that allows our environment to be healthy, and our nations food supply to continue to be strong and secure."

"Any measure would of course need to respect the property rights of all water licence holders, including other irrigation farmers and environmental water holders."

Background

This week (24 March), NSWIC wrote to the NSW Agriculture Minister Adam Marshall saying:

'We would also clearly state that the productive capacity of our State has been reduced by the lack of water being allocated to General Security (GS) farmers on the Murray River and elsewhere. Acknowledging the reality of an enduring drought, the situation is severe, and as

the NSW Agriculture Minister, we urge you to take all necessary steps to ensure maximum food production and economic activity can be provided by irrigated agriculture. In particular we strongly recommend that you examine the opportunity to find an emergency allocation of water on the Murray River and elsewhere, to ensure there is no doubt about maintaining NSW and Australian food security.'

NSWIC also wrote to Minister Pavey on 17 March saying:

'To the matter of food security, it would seem that it is the right time to address the need to ensure that primary production is supported with water, in order to ensure that Australians will continue to have confidence in our domestic food production capacity... Given that is a primary responsibility for all elected governments, would you consider raising with other States and the Federal Minister, the option of an emergency water allocation for NSW general security farmers?'

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