

MEDIA RELEASE

Report by Inspector-General Welcomed

17/04/2020

NSW Irrigators' Council (NSWIC) welcomed today's release of the report by the Interim Inspector-General of Murray-Darling Basin Water Resources on the 'Impact of lower inflows on state shares under the Murray-Darling Basin Agreement'.

NSWIC called for an *'investigation into how drought risk and burden is shared between states, and how sharing arrangements impact on state water allocations and deliverability'* in 2019, and are pleased this was delivered upon.

CEO of NSWIC, Luke Simpkins, said "Drought risk and burden must be shared fairly in a multijurisdictional Basin".

"There are both climatic and regulatory issues facing irrigation farmers in the Basin."

The report identified that:

"Given the marked decrease in inflows over the past two decades it is important that the appropriateness of existing arrangements is reassessed in the context of the changes that are occurring and a future that may be characterised by further extremes."

"The broad water-sharing arrangements have remained the same since the original agreement was established in 1914" with a later increase to South Australia's entitlement.

The report also found that:

"Over the historical record, inflows from the lower Darling have only contributed an average of about 8% of water available in the River Murray system each year." It is pleasing to have clarification from the Interim-Inspector General of this figure.

Whilst inflows into Menindee Lakes have dramatically reduced over the previous 20 years, we are pleased the report immediately clarifies that *"eight of the 13 driest years on record occurred in this period, most yielding zero or close to zero inflows"*.

CEO Luke Simpkins said, "we welcome the recommendation for the MDBA to further analyse the causes of reduced inflows from the Northern Basin, so that people can have a more accurate and informed perspective on this matter."

“This highlights the importance of the Healthy Floodplains Project, which is underway to make floodplain harvesting subject to volumetric limits and brought into line with the Sustainable Diversion Limit”.

“Despite the Healthy Floodplains Project reducing the water access by floodplain irrigation farmers, the project is supported by our industry, as this historic form of water access must be brought into the modern regulatory framework and is a sustainable practice.”

NSWIC welcomes the recommendations, and looks forward to Government action to implement them.

Further Key Findings:

- *More than two-thirds of the decline in median total system inflow volumes is attributable to changes in flows from the Murray upstream of Albury and the Victorian tributaries. Median inflows upstream of Albury have decreased by about one third in the past 20 years compared with the preceding century.*
- *Median inflows in the NSW tributaries have reduced by almost two-thirds over the past 20 years compared with the preceding century.*
- *Median inflows into the Menindee Lakes have reduced by about 80% in the last 20 years relative to the recorded period prior. Eight of the 13 driest years on record occurred in this period, most yielding zero or close to zero inflows.*
- *Over the historical record, inflows from the lower Darling have only contributed an average of about 8% of water available in the River Murray system each year.*

For further information:

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