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## MEDIA RELEASE

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# Proposed price hike a blow for NSW irrigators

**16/09/2020**

A proposed 22% price hike over the next four years is a blow to irrigators in the red after three years of drought, said NSW Irrigators' Council CEO Claire Miller.

The Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) is reviewing the price rise sought by WaterNSW, NRAR and DPIE for water management and rural bulk water services.

Ms Miller said it was especially galling the price hike was supposedly to pay for 'new' services.

"Cost savings were a core tenet of recent reforms, so what happened? As it stands, irrigators are already paying for services that Government agencies have not provided, provided poorly, or are duplicating across departments.

"Few people realise irrigators already pay for 80% of capital expenses, and 100% of operational expenses, to manage our waterways. This is an incredibly high proportion of costs.

"Paying so much is difficult for irrigators to accept given how poorly agencies have managed this precious resource.

"We want to see the costs shared more equitably. Improved water management is in everyone's interest. It is only reasonable that when it's in the public interest, it's paid from the public purse."

NSWIC will be pursuing a fairer cost-share and the lower prices promised from greater administration efficiency claimed to date. Submissions close on 16 October 2020.

IPART will set new prices to apply from 1 July 2021. In a media statement, Chair Dr Paul Paterson recognised that regional and rural customers and communities had endured a long and extreme drought, bushfires and the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We will seek to balance a range of factors including the need to set prices that reflect efficient costs as well as customer bill impacts and affordability," Dr Paterson said.

Government agencies justified the price hike to pay for recent changes in water management in response to several inquiries. Changes include improved compliance and enforcement of water laws, environmental water management, water take measurement, and strategic water planning.

Ms Miller said the initiatives were in the public interest and arose out of a need for the whole community, including irrigators, to have greater confidence in NSW water management.

“Irrigators across NSW are copping flak because of DPIE’s failure to perform. Irrigators paid for services that could not be delivered because DPIE staff have been stripped out of the regional areas they were meant to be managing.

“There’s lots of talk about sharing water, but not so much on sharing the costs of managing water. Irrigators paying 80-100% of costs on behalf of the broader public is not sharing fairly, and a conversation we need to have.

“For all the flak irrigators get, people need to remember who is footing the bill to look after our waterways for a broad range of needs, including for ecosystems and communities.”