

MEDIA RELEASE

Budget: water security more important than ever

7/10/2020

Federal Budget support for water infrastructure will improve water security for irrigators, while \$30 million for improved digital connectivity will enhance accountability and transparency in metering and measuring water take.

“Irrigated agriculture is vital to the Australian economy,” said NSWIC CEO Claire Miller. “The sector has an important role to play in Australia’s COVID recovery effort. We are pleased to see support in the Federal Budget to help us step up to the challenge after several years of drought.”

In 2017-18, irrigated agriculture, which accounts for about 5% of Australia’s tilled farmland, contributed \$17.7 billion to the national economy. This included \$4.2 billion from fruits and nuts, \$3.4 billion from vegetables, \$2.3 billion from cotton, and \$2.2 billion from dairy.¹

Australia’s irrigators feed and clothe the nation, producing 82.5% of our vegetables, 92.5% of fruit and nuts, 92% of grapes, 92% of cotton, 100% of rice, and 52.5% of dairy.

“Irrigated agriculture makes a significant contribution to the economy and provides countless farm, services and food processing jobs from regional to metropolitan areas,” Ms Miller said.

“The prolonged drought is breaking just at the right time for irrigators to assist with the Covid-recovery. Government investment in key programs will boost the economic and jobs dividend in the regions and for the nation.”

In particular, irrigated agriculture will benefit from:

- \$30 million additional funding for Regional Connectivity Program competitive grants. These will help boost remote reading for telemetry and meters to measure water take.
- \$2 billion from the National Water Infrastructure Development Fund over ten years for a long-term focus on building dams, weirs and pipelines across the National Water Grid.
- \$269.6 million for the Murray Darling Communities Investment package to implement Murray Darling Basin Reforms that are community-led.

“We urge the Government to roll out the funding without delay,” said Ms Miller. “Water infrastructure needs to be in place and operational, so we are better prepared for the next drought. Regions adversely affected by Basin Plan reforms also need stimulus without delay.”

¹ Total Gross Value of Irrigated Agricultural Production (GVIAP). ABS data ([Gross Value of Irrigated Agricultural Production 2017-18](#))