
MEDIA RELEASE

ICAC Findings and Recommendations Reassuring

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NSW Irrigators' Council (NSWIC) and the entire irrigation farming sector has strictly zero tolerance to corruption, or any improper conduct.

It should be reassuring to all people of NSW that the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) did not find any corruption, following the three-year investigation into water management in NSW.

NSWIC strongly supports full delivery of all 15 recommendations made by ICAC, and calls on the NSW Government to act on these recommendations without delay.

NSWIC also highlights that since the ICAC investigation commenced in 2017, there has been a fundamental shift in water management in NSW, for the better. NSW now has an exceptionally strong compliance and enforcement regime, with the establishment of the Natural Resource Access Regulator and a new world-leading metering framework being rolled out.

At present, it is the overwhelming view of the irrigation farming community that irrigators are the 'losers' from water policy reform, with clear prioritisation of the environment. The water allocated for irrigation has been substantially reduced over the past 20 years, along with much stricter rules. The changes are necessary to ensure environmental sustainability but, they come at a cost for farmers with less water allocated to feed and clothe the nation..

Water policy in NSW strives to achieve triple-bottom-line objectives (environmental, social and economic), and no interest should be treated preferentially or improperly. This, however, does not mean any stakeholders should be excluded, but rather, that formal channels and platforms must be established for transparent, inclusive and balanced engagement, such as improved public consultation.

This was highlighted in the Matthews Inquiry into NSW water compliance in 2017, which stated there is:

"... no reason for the department to be hesitant about close consultation with irrigator groups in the future. Indeed, the department has a special obligation to understand the views of irrigators, and irrigators have a right to be heard."

NSWIC trusts action on the findings and recommendations from ICAC will contribute to rebuilding public confidence in NSW water management, including much-needed confidence in the irrigation sector itself