

MEDIA RELEASE

Irrigators facing 240% price hike for metering reform

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Irrigators in NSW are being asked to pay up to 240% more in water charges under a new WaterNSW proposal to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART), to cover the costs of implementing the State's world-leading metering reform.

NSW Irrigators' Council CEO Claire Miller said irrigators welcomed metering reform to improve public confidence in water use¹, with many water users paying significant costs to upgrade their meters and install telemetry devices to meet the new standard.

“The problem, however, is that irrigators are now being asked to also pay exorbitant additional water charges to WaterNSW to cover their claimed costs to deliver the reforms.

“We can't get straight answers on what is driving this massive hike, whether WaterNSW has grossly exceeded its planned expenditure, or is facing budget cuts as the Government looks for savings to pay for its Covid response.

“Whatever the reason, it is not acceptable to hit up water users to make up the difference, especially when farmers are still in the red after years of drought.

“The NSW and Australian Governments have talked up how the regions can help lead the national economic recovery from the pandemic, but here we have an agency apparently determined to drive farmers out of business, and the communities whose jobs rely on them.”

NSWIC is calling on the Government to step up and fund WaterNSW to implement the world-leading metering reforms. Irrigators already not only pay for the water they use, but also pay for the bulk of the State's water infrastructure and the costs of agencies to manage water.

Irrigators have long paid for agencies to perform metering, compliance and enforcement roles, but numerous investigations have found these services weren't previously performed well.

“Water users should not have to face cost increases for services previously paid for, but not delivered, or delivered poorly. If you buy five coffees, and the café only gives you four, you shouldn't have to pay a second time for the one that was never delivered in the first place.

“Irrigators don't mind paying for services, as long as we receive those services. Prices should not be going up without a net increase in services, much less being expected to retrospectively address past expenditure blowouts.”

¹ <https://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/metering>

NSWIC is concerned the proposal creates the false impression metering services are a new function for WaterNSW. It is also concerned WaterNSW is attempting to pass on the costs associated with upgrading Government-owned meters to be compliant with the new standards, when DPIE-Water made a public commitment that water users would not pay for the upgrades.

NSWIC has provided a supplementary submission to IPART, calling the proposed price rise exorbitant and unreasonable. IPART is accepting feedback on the WaterNSW proposal via: <https://www.ipart.nsw.gov.au/Home/Industries/Water/Reviews/Rural-Water/WaterNSW-rural-bulk-water-prices-from-1-July-2021>