

## STATEMENT

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# Barriers to metering upgrades must be addressed

**22/07/2021**

NSW Irrigators' Council shares the frustration over low rates of full compliance with new metering standards in the first phase of the Government's non-urban metering reform.

NSWIC calls on Government to speed up its rollout to have any hope of meeting timeframes. The metering upgrade 'stroll-out' needs to pick up the pace.

All agencies involved in the rollout must do more to overcome the widely recognised market, technical and validation barriers slowing down the rollout. These barriers are making it impossible for irrigators to comply with deadlines despite best efforts.

At the same time, our message to water users across the State is clear: do not leave it until the last minute to place orders for new meters and contact duly qualified persons (DQPs) about what you need to do for installation, validation and certification.

You must be able to demonstrate to the Natural Resources Access Regulator (NRAR) that you have made every effort to comply from the earliest opportunity, whether your deadline is 1 December 2021 in northern valleys, 1 December 2022 in southern valleys or 1 December 2023 along the coast.

It is the only way to keep the pressure where it should be: on the Government and agencies to stop their stroll-out on addressing the barriers to compliance.

Key barriers include: limited pattern-approved devices & timeliness of approval; lack of market capacity, manufacturing delays and supply issues (i.e. due to Covid-19); mobile coverage issues (for the DAS/telemetry); a shortage of Duly Qualified Persons (DQPs) to install and validate the new devices; and, unresponsive administration when DQPs and water users seek advice and assistance to navigate the Government's validation and certification system.

As for the recent media headlines asserting that 45% of large irrigators in NSW have not upgraded to compliant meters, some context is necessary.

First, the irrigators already have meters. After the 2017 Four Corners story 'Pumped', the Government responded by setting up NRAR and adopting a gold metering standard that irrigators large and small across NSW must comply with in a phased rollout ending in late 2023. No irrigators anywhere else in Australia have to have meters meeting this standard.

First tranche is those with the largest pumps, numbering 384-480 entities (the authorities are unable to provide an exact number). Their deadline was 1 December last year.

When setting deadlines, the Government didn't check first whether any manufacturers actually made meters that could perform to that standard in the field. Most weren't interested in designing such a meter given the small size of the NSW market in global terms.

Five companies eventually entered the market, and only one manufactures in Australia. These are not off-the-shelf devices, and irrigators are waiting up to 10 months for meters to arrive. The meters then need to be installed, validated and certified by DQPs. However, we have called around and found only about 100 of them are active in the market.

NRAR has to some extent accepted irrigators are facing barriers beyond their control.

NRAR's 45% headline relates to a small subset, many of whom are now on a pathway to compliance. Our research shows it is only a very small handful of less than 10 irrigators who haven't acted yet. The rest are caught in the Governments stroll-out with nothing more they can do.

The rollout will only get more challenging. An estimated 3200 irrigators with about 7500-8000 smaller works in the northern inland valleys are in Tranche 2. They need to have meters compliant with the new standard installed and validated by 1 December this year.

That means the manufacturers are even more swamped. But even if all the meters arrived at the farms tomorrow, they will need to be installed at a rate of 88 meters per workday. Then, based on Tranche 1, NRAR officers will need to travel 900,000km, or 22 laps around the Earth, to audit the Tranche 2 works.

Many more DQPs are desperately needed, along with a validation portal that works and adequate mobile coverage so that meters and telemetry devices can be read remotely as required under the reforms and therefore be certified as compliant.

To repeat, irrigators already have meters in place. This reform is about upgrading those meters to a higher gold standard. The industry supports the reform but has warned the Government repeatedly over the years that it must admit and address the barriers outside irrigators' control.

Without serious change by Government to pick up the pace, there is impending policy failure and industry will not take the blame for that.