

MEDIA RELEASE

More water for coastal drought and fire resilience

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Landholders along the NSW coast will now be able to capture more water at times of plenty to help tide them and their communities over in droughts.

The Government decision to allow coastal water users to capture up to 30 per cent of rainfall runoff on their properties is a momentous step forward for water security,” said CEO Claire Miller.

“With climate change, the ability to capture water at times of plenty, to store for times of water scarcity, will be increasingly important, particularly with more extreme weather events.”

“Increasing the harvestable right from 10 to 30 per cent will allow coastal farmers to adapt to changing rainfall patterns and increase agricultural sustainability and climate change resilience.

“Irrigated agriculture in NSW’s coastal valleys is highly valued on dinner tables across Australia, from dairy to tomatoes, berries, potatoes and many other fruits and vegetables. This decision will help keep food on our tables as the climate changes.”

The decision also comes as a relief for firefighting efforts, given even in high rainfall areas along the coast, firefighters in the 2019/20 bushfires struggled to source water to douse the flames.

The Final Report of the NSW Bushfire Inquiry 2020 indicated that increased water storage is critical for fighting bushfires and protecting vulnerable communities.

“The recent tragic bushfire season was an example of just how important water storages are for the whole community, particularly for firefighting efforts,” said Ms Miller.

“The coastal irrigation community has been wanting this change for many years. They are thrilled with this announcement which follows significant hydrological and environmental assessments and modelling, as well as extensive community consultation.

“NSWIC adopted a clear principle in a submission to the public consultation that an increase in harvestable rights should not have a significant impact on the environment. With such extensive assessments, we are confident this has been achieved.”

Increasing the coastal harvestable right will also provide additional flash flood mitigation for urban communities in high rainfall events, help restore natural hydrological regimes and reduce mass soil erosion events.