



Climate Change Position Statement

Preamble

- NSWIC identifies climate change and climate change policy as the most significant risks to water security for irrigated agriculture in NSW and our regional communities.
- Irrigators (and other lower security entitlement holders) are the first and hardest hit by the impacts of climate change on water availability. Water management frameworks have a hierarchy of water users, with rivers & critical human needs prioritised first, and water licences held by irrigators (and those bought back from irrigators for the environment) last in line for water, and only if it is available (with various licence categories prioritised accordingly).
- Water management frameworks have automatic response mechanisms built in to change the amount of water allocated to water licences based on water availability. During drought, water allocations are reduced, and often to zero for many licence types, for consecutive years.
- A trend of higher variability in rainfall and inflows is already observable by scientists, and consequently, a trend of declining reliability of water entitlements (i.e. a long-term trend of lower water allocations to water licences). Note: the reliability trend is also partly attributable to other policy drivers.
- Legislation currently provides that water access entitlement holders (such as irrigators) “*are to bear the risks of any reduction or less reliable water allocation*” as a result of “*seasonal or long-term changes in climate*” or “*periodic natural events such as bushfires and drought*”. This makes irrigators particularly vulnerable to climate change.
- A fundamental principle of water conservation is to capture and conserve water in times of plenty, so water is available at times of water scarcity.
- Australian irrigators are world-leaders in water-efficiency. For example, Australian grown rice uses 50% less water than the global average, and Australian cotton is three times more water-efficient than the global average.

Positions

- NSWIC supports an economy-wide target of net zero emissions by 2050, preferably earlier¹.
- NSWIC adopts an aspirational target of working towards carbon neutrality for the NSW irrigation sector by 2030. We are willing to do our share, and play our part within the broader economy, but we cannot be expected to shoulder the burden for others wanting a free ride.
- NSWIC recognises that the NSW irrigation sector has a critical role in responding to growing demand for food and fibre (with the world population forecast to exceed 9 billion by 2050), as well as a role in supporting Australia to meet its obligations on carbon emissions reduction.
- NSWIC calls on government to recognise existing measures and invest in pathways for innovation (such as carbon sequestration opportunities) for the irrigation sector to be part of the solution. The irrigation sector seeks partnership opportunities to make this happen.
- Irrigation farmers manage significant amounts of land and water, and thus must, and want, to be part of the solution and to drive change. This is both an opportunity for our communities, and responsibility for our sector. The irrigation sector expects to be supported by policies to enable us to play our part in the response to climate change, without any additional risk of perverse outcomes (in addition to those above).
- NSWIC recognises that the NSW irrigation industry has a critical role to play in achieving all of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, such as Goal 2 (zero hunger), Goal 6 (clean water and sanitation), Goal 8 (decent work and economic growth), Goal 12 (responsible consumption and production), and Goal 13 (climate action).
- A changing climate means we will all have to 'do better' to manage available water to achieve outcomes more efficiently and effectively.
- Our irrigation farmers are already world-leaders in water-efficiency and sustainable farming, and we need government climate change policy to catch-up and keep-up, to ensure our global reputation for sustainable food and fibre production is not tarnished.
- The developed landscape is part of the contemporary ecosystem, and hosts community values and expectations to manage in a changing climate, with an important role for sustainable and productive land and water management.
- Climate change mitigation, as well as adaptation, is critical to protect water security for farming.

¹ Provided there are identifiable and economically viable pathways, and farmers are not burdened by unnecessary regulatory impediment.