

Water objectives can be achieved with less red tape and fairer allocation of cost & risk - NIC

[National Irrigators' Council \(NIC\) submission to the Productivity Commission's triennial review of the National Water Initiative \(NWI\)](#) says objectives can be achieved without reducing agricultural productivity, and in a way that more fairly allocates cost and risks.

NIC CEO Steve Whan said "irrigated agriculture is a vital contributor to providing the food and fibre enjoyed by Australians and makes a critical contribution to earning current, and future, export income. Australia's irrigators are among the most efficient in the world. With efficiency driven by industry innovation and investment – sometimes assisted by Government programs.

"The NWI has seen reforms that have changed the nature of irrigation businesses. They have established a market for water, changed pricing principles and created water planning regimes that address overallocation and environmental water.

"Those principles have helped drive efficiency, however, there are issues with implementation. Poorly designed oversight creates unnecessary red tape; lack of transparency in bulk water pricing leads to concerns that Irrigators are paying costs more appropriately borne by Government; and there is a need to ensure that acquisition of environmental water takes account of full community cost."

The key issues highlighted in the submission include:

- Irrigators' commitment to a genuine triple bottom line outcome from water reform;
- Irrigators continuing advocacy for achieving environmental outcomes not just the ticking off flow targets. Including the need for complementary measures to improve the health of our river systems;
- Change fatigue experienced by irrigators and irrigation communities;
- The need for bulk water pricing policies to adequately and transparently account for Community Service Obligations to ensure that Irrigators are not paying for expenses that are more appropriately borne by the community as a whole;
- Water property rights and the need to ensure they are not diminished by planning processes and that the allocation of risk is appropriately spread;
- The need to avoid duplication in planning processes;
- Reducing red tape in reporting and monitoring;
- Improving the timeliness and transparency of water market information;
- Opposition to water buyback and the need to ensure that any analysis of "least cost" includes full assessment of community impact and benefit rather than simple dollar cost;
- The reasons member owned Irrigation Infrastructure Operators (IIOs) should be more lightly regulated than Government owned operators;
- The need for less regulation in the charging rules applied to IIOs.

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