

Electricity regulation needs focus on Australian needs - not owners' needs - says agriculture

A meeting of agricultural groups representing irrigators and farmers, nationally and across four states, has reinforced the need to continue to fight for lower electricity prices if Australia is to remain an internationally competitive food and fibre producer.

The meeting of the Agricultural Industries Energy Taskforce noted some positive steps on the electricity front over the past twelve months, with the Taskforce's submissions and lobbying gaining recognition that the electricity crisis directly impacts food and fibre production.

However, the group was united in agreeing that action must continue to focus on getting prices down.

National Irrigators Council CEO, Steve Whan said "our group has made it clear that we believe the long term ceiling for electricity prices should be 8 cents per kw/h for electrons and 8 cents for distribution – around a 30% reduction on current prices.

"As agricultural groups we sometimes feel our perspective is not given enough precedence by energy regulators and rule setters, often because we aren't talking the language the industry insiders use.

"We make no apology for not talking their language – because we are talking about whether Australia can produce and export food and fibre competitively, whether our farmers can afford to keep generating the jobs families and communities rely on. We want regulators to make Australia's national interest a much higher priority when they consider network prices and setting the rules that are supposed to generate a competitive market.

"Australia should be a country with affordable power, yet price increases are pushing some producers off the grid and onto diesel generation. One Queensland irrigation district is in danger of shutting down completely because of the cost of pumping water.

"The Taskforce this week recommitted to its engagement with decision makers, lobbying for rule changes to benefit consumers along with encouraging direct action to help primary producers reduce their power costs.

"The meeting also provided a great opportunity to bring together work being done by groups like NSW and Qld Farmers, Canegrowers, Cotton and Dairy Farmers and the Australian Farm Institute.

"It was a positive meeting but we still have a lot of challenges ahead."

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