

Thursday 23rd February, 2012

New Water Buybacks neither Strategic or Smart

The National Irrigators' Council today said today's announcement of new water buy backs in the Southern Basin was neither, strategic or smart and had already been widely condemned as being unworkable.

The NIC CEO, Tom Chesson said the Government was informed over twelve months ago that it would in all probability be illegal for private irrigation infrastructure operators to say who could and couldn't sell water out of their schemes.

"Yet in a media release issued by the Minister, it makes it clear that infrastructure network operators would have to advise which sales could go ahead within their systems.

"The ACCC has made it very clear that any barriers to trade put in place by irrigation network operators will be severely dealt with."

Mr Chesson said today's announcement was not consistent with Tony Burke's commitment in November last year that there would be no more general tenders in the southern basin until 2013.

"Both the Minister and the Chairman of the MDBA have repeatedly told community meetings that they would like to see more water recovered through infrastructure, environmental works and measures and rules changes, yet today's announcement seems to suggest that this is not the case.

"Communities have repeatedly expressed their frustration with the snail paced roll out of infrastructure funding and nothing in today's announcement gives any hope the Government has heard those concerns."

Mr Chesson said irrigation network operators have been having ongoing discussions with the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (SEWPaC) about strategic water recovery but this proposal bears no resemblance to what they have been talking about.

In fact, the Minister's announcement includes the 'right of veto' for irrigation infrastructure operators that has been expressly rejected by those same infrastructure operators.

The Department is simply not listening.

"Today's announcement is a political announcement to give the impression the Government has implemented a key recommendation from the Windsor Review.

"We do not believe that the Government's announcement is strategic and are fearful that it may in fact be illegal and result in irrigation network operators being taken to court if they advise against a sale taking place.

"We have been in discussions with the Government about strategic buybacks and were very disappointed to see today's media release which has come out of the blue," Mr Chesson concluded.

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