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Irrigators want their rights respected in South Australia

Irrigators in South Australia are seeking a better deal from political parties ahead of the state election, calling for changes to legislation to allow for compensation in the event they lose access to water.

Unlike some other states, South Australia's risk assignment framework provides no compensation for irrigators in the event that government decisions permanently reduce the reliability of their entitlements.

The National Irrigators' Council, on behalf of its South Australian members, has written to all major parties seeking a commitment to include compensation arrangements in their election policies.

"With the Murray Darling Basin Plan likely to reduce water availability for irrigators and at least one groundwater allocation plan currently proposing big cuts, it's imperative that irrigators have an opportunity to seek compensation," said NIC CEO, Danny O'Brien.

"This does not mean we accept cuts but we need to have back-up in the event they occur. The National Water Initiative, which South Australia is a signatory to, was designed to provide a clear property right to water for irrigators. NIC strongly believes that if that property right is diminished by governments then irrigators should be compensated.

"If a homeowner is forced out of their house because the land is needed for a freeway, then they are rightly compensated at market value. The same should apply to water when the community decides to allocate more to the environment at the expense of irrigators.

"Irrigators produce the food that all Australians rely on, along with export income and the primary products that drive so many regional industries.

"To have the confidence to stay on their farms and invest for the future, they need the security of a water entitlement that can't be just ripped away from them by the stroke of a Minister's pen, with no compensation."

South Australia has opted out of the NWI framework which allocates risk according to a specific formula.

Irrigators are calling for political parties to either commit to amendments to the Natural Resources Management Act to provide for compensation, or to opt back in to the NWI framework.

"We also expect that political parties will consult with South Australian irrigators on any changes they intend to make when in government," Mr O'Brien concluded.

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