

Media release

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All risk on irrigators: Ministers told

Murray Irrigation and Southern Riverina Irrigators told the NSW Deputy Premier and the Minister for Natural Resources, Lands and Water that the risk of not getting the Basin Plan implementation right is carried by irrigators.

Mr Simpson and Southern Riverina Irrigators Chairman John Bradford met with the Ministers and Member for Murrumbidgee and candidate for Murray in the next election, Adrian Piccoli in Deniliquin on Friday 27 February.

"Irrigators are highly vulnerable, yet implementation of the Plan is out of our control," Murray Irrigation Chairman, Bruce Simpson said.

"From now on, much of the actual implementation work is up to the States to determine but if they get it wrong the Commonwealth will be back in our areas buying back water and that impacts across our community.

"We explained to the (Water) Minister that comments about not supporting buyback are welcome, but the reality is the Commonwealth is in the market and we need more than words.

"The State must achieve the SDL offsets through the adjustment mechanism to minimise the amount of water to be recovered from irrigators," he said.

Mr Simpson explained that not all potential solutions for SDL offsets are, of themselves, risk free.

"We talked about the risk to NSW Murray allocations if solutions for Menindee Lakes and the Broken Hill water supply are not thought through thoroughly.

"Consideration of the impacts of change must be across all water availability scenarios – not average years."

"From SRI's perspective, we are very cautious that, in trying to fix a problem in one area, they don't inadvertently cause a problem somewhere else," Mr Bradford said.

"As far as we are concerned, the yield and reliability of our water entitlements must be sacrosanct.

"It was good the Ministers came to town to listen, but now they need to prove to us they have heard. We need to be reassured that our entitlement will not be eroded in anyway," he said.

Murray Irrigation also discussed constraints management and legal liability with the visiting Ministers.

"Murray Irrigation has a legal responsibility to operate our system to allow free flow of flood waters.

"The constraints management strategy does not look at the issue of legal liability or water accountability in systems like ours at all, and that is not acceptable," Mr Simpson said.

The Ministers were each provided a copy of Murray Irrigation's submission on constraints management.

Ends

2 March 2015

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