



NSW IRRIGATORS' COUNCIL

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Senate Environment, Communications and the Arts Reference Committee

Water Licensing Inquiry

Answers to Questions on Notice

100218

Introduction

NSW Irrigators' Council (NSWIC) represents more than 12,000 irrigation farmers across NSW. These irrigators access regulated, unregulated and groundwater systems. Our members include valley water user associations, food and fibre groups, irrigation corporations and commodity groups from the rice, cotton, dairy and horticultural industries.

This document represents the views of the members of NSWIC. However each member reserves the right to independent policy on issues that directly relate to their areas of operation, or expertise, or any other issues that they may deem relevant.

Comments

NSWIC appeared before the Senate Environment, Communications and the Arts Committee Inquiry into Water Licences on Thursday 18 February 2010 in Sydney subsequent to lodging written submission.

During proceedings, several questions were taken on notice. The following is our evidence for consideration in answering these questions.

SLEEPER AND DOZER POSITION:

Senator XENOPHON – How do you think sleeper licences should be treated in the context of what this inquiry is looking at?

Mr Gregson—I am sorry, I do not have the remit of my council to comment on that. I would need to check with them.

Senator XENOPHON – Aren't sleeper licences a pretty fundamental issue, though?

Mr Gregson – Yes, they are most definitely an issue. Whether they are fundamental or not is a matter of subjectivity.

Mr Gregson – Yes, the issue of sleeper licences is obviously a significant one, but I simply do not have the remit to comment in any great depth on that. I would need to check with our council. That is the whole concept of having a council to form an opinion on something.

Senator XENOPHON – Mr Gregson, this is not a criticism. You have been an outspoken advocate for your organisation. I find it very curious, to say the least, that you do not have the remit to comment on an issue as important, as many would say, as sleeper licences. Can you tell us why the New South Wales Irrigators Council does not have a policy position in relation to sleeper licences?

Mr Gregson – Thank you. The council has been around for 26 years. I have been around for 2½. It would require me to do a bit more work on exactly what policy has been in place on sleeper licences in the last 26 years, particularly given that in New South Wales the primary issue of sleeper licences occurred prior to my tenure.

CHAIR—Senator Xenophon, would you like to ask Mr Gregson to take your last question on notice?

Senator XENOPHON – I would like him to take that question on notice.

NSWIC POSITION

NSWIC supports the right in all licensed entitlements regardless of whether they have been activated. It is therefore the position of NSWIC that all licenses should be treated equally. A licence is a licence and therefore a property right which needs to be recognised as such. The fact that a licence has not been activated should not diminish the value or right that this licence possesses. Treating them differently is to discriminate against them.

MENINDEE SYSTEM:

Senator XENOPHON – Yes, if he could. Thank you. Mr Gregson, in relation to Menindee Lake and the 640-gigalitre rule, when I spoke to the Darling River Action Group back in 2008 they were quite critical of the lack of action by successive New South Wales governments to ensure that there would be a more efficient way to store water for Broken Hill—rather than that water evaporating in that very shallow pan that many would see. What is the view of the New South Wales Irrigators Council, firstly, in relation to the 640-gigalitre rule, which is still under the control of New South Wales, and, secondly, about the lack of action on a more efficient water storage facility for the city of Broken Hill?

Mr Gregson – The 640 and 480-gigalitre rule is obviously included in the interstate sharing agreement, which is now annexed to the Water Act. We understand that that agreement is under review at the COAG level, and we look forward to hearing the deliberations of the group that are looking at that. At the moment we do not see that there is a problem with the way that that system is managed in terms of the interstate water-sharing agreement, but we do see that there is a problem in terms of the efficiency of storage in the Menindee Lakes system, particularly in terms of the water supply for Broken Hill. We have been frustrated that the money set aside to do something to improve the efficiency of the Menindee Lakes system is still sitting aside and nothing as yet has been done. We would be very pleased to see action on part (b) of the options paper put forward by the New South Wales government actually occur and Menindee get to a state of much more efficient storage.

Senator XENOPHON—Could you give some more details on that on notice.

NSWIC POSITION

With respect to the progress of works, this is really a question for the Commonwealth and NSW Government's.

NSWIC understands that an “Options Paper – Part A” was concluded quite some time ago. That Paper addressed the possible options for improving the efficiency of the Menindee system, including provision of water supply to Broken Hill.

We understand that the next step in the process is an “Options Paper – Part B” which will identify a preferred option. There has clearly been significant delay in the publication of that process which concerns us greatly.