

SUBMISSION

Productivity Commission - National Water Reform 2026

May 2026



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Introduction

The NSW Irrigators' Council (NSWIC) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Productivity Commission's 2026 review of national water reform and implementation of the National Water Initiative (NWI). This feedback is provided in response to questions posed in Information Request Part A, pertaining to the assessment of the NWI and progress made since the Productivity Commissions 2024 NWI assessment.

NSWIC encourages the Productivity Commission to consider the fundamental importance of reliable and secure water access to grow our nation's food and fibre, and the need for best-practice water management strategy to ensure the productive use of water resources into the future.

The NWI remains one of Australia's most significant water and environmental reform frameworks. Its success has depended on balancing sustainable water management with secure property rights, transparent governance, efficient markets and confidence in long-term investment settings. As water systems face pressure from climate variability, competing demands and ongoing regulatory reform, water users in NSW are losing confidence in the integrity and predictability of the framework.

NSWIC's submission focuses on practical implementation challenges emerging in NSW that have broader relevance to the effectiveness of national water reform. The experience of water users in NSW demonstrates that reform success depends more on implementation capability, proportionality, transparency and institutional accountability, than on policy ambition.

A recurring concern across multiple reform programs is the growing disconnect between policy development and operational delivery. Water users are increasingly being asked to absorb the cumulative impacts of overlapping reforms, changing compliance obligations and rising regulatory costs without corresponding improvements in transparency, implementation certainty or administrative efficiency. This risks undermining confidence in the broader water management framework, including confidence in water property rights, cost recovery arrangements and long-term investment settings.

NSWIC strongly supports sustainable water management, achievable compliance frameworks and evidence-based reform. However, enduring reform legitimacy requires governments to maintain clear risk allocation frameworks, transparent reporting obligations and genuine engagement with affected stakeholders. These principles are central to the original intent of the NWI and remain critical to its continued success.



1. Progress since the 2024 NWI assessment

National reform principles and confidence in water governance

The long-term success of the NWI depends on maintaining confidence in the integrity, predictability and transparency of Australia's water governance framework. Water markets, entitlement systems and long-term regional investment decisions all rely on clear rules, credible institutions and confidence that policy changes will be implemented in a transparent, proportionate and evidence-based manner.

Adaptive governance frameworks must provide sufficient transparency and accountability to maintain confidence in entitlement reliability, market operation and investment settings. Where reforms are perceived to be unpredictable, inconsistently implemented or lacking procedural clarity, this can undermine stakeholder confidence in both institutions and the broader reform framework.

The NWI sought to balance environmental sustainability objectives with secure water property rights, transparent risk assignment frameworks and market certainty. In NSWIC's view, that balance has been lost. Future reform efforts should continue to support sustainable environmental outcomes while also ensuring that water users and regional communities retain confidence in the durability and integrity of entitlement frameworks and water market institutions.

This is particularly important given the cumulative scale of concurrent reforms currently being undertaken across water planning, metering, floodplain harvesting, connectivity and operational frameworks. Greater emphasis should be placed on implementation transparency, cumulative impact assessment, stakeholder engagement and clear articulation of how reform risks and costs are allocated across governments, water users and the broader community.

Transparency and institutional trust

Across multiple reform programs in NSW, water users are reporting declining confidence in water governance processes due to the cumulative pace of reform, limited consultation and opaque implementation practices. Stakeholders increasingly report difficulty understanding how decisions are being made, how cumulative impacts are being assessed across concurrent reforms, and how agencies are balancing operational and consumptive objectives with superseding environmental objectives.

These concerns are particularly evident in recent water sharing plan amendments, floodplain harvesting licensing, metering reforms and emerging connectivity and minimum inflow projects. In many cases, stakeholders are being asked to respond to substantial regulatory changes without access to clear baseline information, transparent modelling assumptions, implementation timelines or cumulative impact assessments. Delays to major programs, changing compliance obligations and fragmented communication between agencies have further contributed to uncertainty and reform fatigue.

NSWIC members broadly recognise the need for adaptive water management and sustainable environmental outcomes. However, confidence in reform processes is weakened where implementation lacks transparency, predictability and procedural clarity. This creates risks not only for stakeholder trust, but also for confidence in entitlement reliability, investment planning and broader water market settings.



NSWIC submits that future reform frameworks should place greater emphasis on implementation transparency, including clear public reporting on policy impacts, entitlement reliability implications, implementation progress and reform outcomes. Strengthening accountability and stakeholder engagement will improve both the effectiveness and long-term legitimacy of future water reform efforts.

NSW water resource plans in the Murray–Darling Basin

The NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment, and Water (NSW-DCCEEW) has not received accreditation for the eight outstanding water resource plans in the Murray-Darling Basin.

Four plans have been accredited by the Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA):

- Lachlan Surface Water Resource Plan – May 2024
- NSW Murray and Lower Darling Surface Water Resource Plan – May 2024
- Barwon-Darling Watercourse Water Resource Plan – June 2024
- Macquarie Castlereagh Surface Water Resource Plan – June 2024

Four plans remain unaccredited by the MDBA:

- Namoi Alluvium Water Resource Plan (latest consultation in June 2019)
- Namoi Surface Water Resource Plan (latest consultation in November 2019)
- Gwydir Alluvium Water Resource Plan (latest consultation in December 2018)
- Gwydir Surface Water Resource Plan (latest consultation in November 2018)

All unaccredited plans were due to be resubmitted to MDBA in 2025, following further work. It is unclear if this has occurred; NSW-DCCEEW has not communicated the progress or status of these WRPs with water users.

The NSW-DCCEEW website states, “The key outstanding issues primarily relate to the Part 14 of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan, which requires us to undertake culturally appropriate consultation with Aboriginal communities.” NSW-DCCEEW also note, “The Namoi Surface Water Resource Plan also requires additional work in relation to floodplain harvesting content. This is a substantial body of work.”

It is unclear to water users what feedback has been heard and integrated into these plans, as this is not a transparent process between DCCEEW and MDBA.

Ongoing issues with floodplain harvesting licensing

NSW-DCCEEW has not finished licensing floodplain harvesting (FPH) in northern NSW. Departmental delays, technical constraints and natural conditions have left many water users unable to achieve compliance with metering obligations despite efforts to meet requirements.

There are also ongoing technical shortfalls with the metering software, the Data Acquisition Service (DAS), and WaterNSW water accounting software (iWAS). The DAS was built as a minimum viable product and has had numerous issues in performing its basic functions. The paperwork to be completed by Duly Qualified Persons (DQPs) is complex and requires numerous



steps required for validation. As this is all done independently from water users, water users may assume their works are compliant only to later learn that a final procedural step was missed and the work has not been recorded as compliant on the WaterNSW database. This is out of the control and knowledge of water users.

The disconnection between iWAS (the platform that registers take and sends it to WaterNSW) and DAS (the hardware that sends the signal from the meter to the account) has also emerged as an issue. Despite irrigators following the correct steps, iWAS may not update properly and is unable to measure FPH take. For those users that have spent time and resources to become compliant, it is frustrating that issues have not been resolved after several years of program implementation.

Delays to floodplain harvesting licensing and resulting legal uncertainty have left water users cautious about how to navigate water take during floodplain harvesting events. Northern NSW has had several FPH events across 2025 but, due to legal proceedings and an extended appeal timeframe given to DCCEEW, this critical area of water take remains unresolved.

In the midst of such legal uncertainty, water users are left vulnerable to NRAR scrutiny, with no clarity on the legality of water take during a FPH event. This uncertainty creates an opportunity loss for irrigators in terms of accessing, storing or using this water.

Rollout of AS4747 metering

NSW-DCCEEW has not completed its rollout of AS4747 metering. Following the DCCEEWs non-urban metering reform review (2024) and independent telemetry review (2025), recommendations have been steadily actioned. Quarterly Reports by NSW-DCCEEW on their website details process on these recommendations.

As part of these recommendations, in March 2025 the revised measurement requirements and compliance dates came into effect. Dependent on their geographic location, work size and total entitlement, some coastal and smaller entitlement volume water users have had their compliance dates extended to 1 December 2026 or later. This reflects DCCEEWs risk-based approach to the revised Metering Framework; high-risk works need to comply sooner than smaller, low risk works.

NSWIC has identified a range of ongoing delivery constraints beyond the control of water users that continue to delay or prevent works complying with the requirements. These are experienced throughout all stages of the water user journey to compliance – see table 1.



Table 1 Identification of metering barriers beyond water user control at each stage of the metering journey.

Stage of journey	Barriers to water user compliance
Learning about the Metering Framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inconsistent policy instruments - Inconsistent guidance from water agencies - Poor education strategy to target water users needing support - Limited engagement methods with water users
Checking specific licence and works approval details	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Poorly communicated work classification amendment process - Poorly maintained WaterNSW customer and licence database
Engaging a Duly Qualified Persons (DQP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Underdeveloped DQP markets - Low DQP retention - Lack of DQP supply in local communities
Performing a self-installation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cost of metering equipment - Technical skill requirements - Low support for smaller water users
Installing telemetry devices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of transparency on barriers to telemetry - Poor policy settings for telemetry requirements - Long Telemetry Uplift Program wait times - No financial support for coastal telemetry - Unresolved telemetry equivalence pathways
Maintaining metering and telemetry systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Limited recognition of the burden of maintenance - Administrative procedures when a meter is faulty
Meeting recording and reporting obligations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Impractical attestation requirements - Limited access to online systems – DAS and iWAS - Poor telemetered data quality control - Limited education about reporting requirements

Barriers to water user compliance span across technical barriers, policy shortfalls, underdeveloped markets and poor education, we consider that the NSW non-urban metering framework is not yet fit-for-purpose.

NSW-DCCEEW regularly engages with water user associations, WaterNSW customer advisory groups and NSWIC to provide updates and receive feedback on the ongoing roll out of this reform.

Imposing LTAAELs in unregulated river water sharing plans is duplicative

We recognise the Commission's support for the establishment of an accurate numeric LTAAEL across all water sharing plans. We note that some unregulated river Water Sharing Plans have a numeric LTAAEL established, such as the Barwon-Darling.

The NSW-DCCEEW is progressing this work through an omnibus order announced in early 2026. They report states:



“We are completing work to calculate a numeric LTAAEL value for inland unregulated plans. The numeric LTAAEL will replace a definitional (rule based) LTAAEL to improve transparency and clarity regarding the allowable volume of take. The numeric LTAAEL value specifies the amount of water that can be taken from the extraction management units by licence holders within a specified time. The proposed change includes a completion date of 31 December 2026 for the determination of a numeric LTAAEL, the requirement to request the Natural Resources Commission (NRC) to provide advice on the method used to establish the numeric LTAAEL, and to publish the numeric LTAAEL.¹”

NSWIC is concerned that this line of work is duplicative, given that Sustainable Diversion Limits (SDL) already in place for these Water Sharing Plans (WSP). SDL units are factored into both regulated and unregulated WSP due to being calculated at a unit scale. This is a rigorous management tool in WSP across NSW.

Current WSP also already include an indication of extraction limits, based on long-term average flows. For example, the Namoi Regulated WSP notes:

“by limiting long-term average extractions to an estimated 238,000 megalitres per year this Plan ensures that approximately 73% of the long-term average annual flow in these water sources (estimated to be 870,000 megalitres per year) will be preserved and will contribute to the maintenance of basic ecosystem health.”²

Almost all other WSP have these limits spelled out, so NSWIC also queries the urgency of the numeric LTAAEL review.

2. Barriers and emerging risks

Regulatory burden on regional water users

Water regulation in NSW is unnecessarily complex. Significant state-level reforms have occurred since 2018, on top of the major reforms delivered through the Basin Plan. Constant reforms have led to regulation “stacking” and government responses have been characterised by haste: rapid reforms to regulatory oversight, drought and flood events, pandemic and war-driven supply pressures, and repeated changes to water-sharing rules.

Everyday regional water users have been left to navigate a range of new and revised programs, regulations and agencies. Such complexity does not provide an easy regulatory environment for stakeholders and is not a minor inconvenience. Regulatory complexity weakens confidence in the system, reduces compliance clarity, and imposes real costs on an industry that contributes over \$4 billion annually to the NSW economy.

It is becoming increasingly common for program delivery to be delayed beyond initial timeframes, suffer cost blow outs, and cause rising confusion and disengagement from water

¹ [2026 water sharing plans omnibus amendment order](#)

² [Water Sharing Plan for the Upper Namoi and Lower Namoi Regulated River Water Sources 2016](#)



users due to reform fatigue. Our members are concerned that they fund, without material benefit, the inefficient, ineffective and often incomplete programs through the current water user cost sharing arrangements set by the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART).

There is considerable room to simplify the patchwork of overlapping laws, policies and regulatory frameworks that are costly to navigate and often misaligned with operational realities. Co-designed solutions must be found to deliver programs more efficiently and improve communication and engagement between state-level agencies.

Funding of NSW water agencies

Water prices allocated to water users should be prudent and efficient. In 2024, WaterNSW and Water Administration Ministerial Council (WAMC) submitted proposals to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) proposing significant increases to their capital and operating expenditure, with the lions share to be borne by regional water users.

IPART found that there was insufficient evidence to justify many of the proposed cost increases put forward by WaterNSW and WAMC. IPART also received feedback from stakeholders questioning historic overspending, operational inefficiencies and lacking prioritisation of core programs and regional customer service. Consequently, IPART's pricing determinations in 2025 and 2026 reduced the WaterNSW and NSW-DCCEEW budgets.

On the ground, this has impacted DCCEEW and WaterNSW resourcing; both organisations have/are undergoing structural change including voluntary and forced staff redundancies. This has impacted customer-facing staffing arrangements, and the progression of key work programs. Many program timelines are now unclear, including projects such as water resource plans strategies, water sharing plan reviews, and specialised projects like minimum inflows, and coastal sustainable extraction.

Cost-sharing arrangements

In previous submissions to the Commission, NSWIC has recommended a new cost-sharing framework for setting prices is required that appropriately recovers costs for public interest items and reflects the source of demand originating beyond immediate water users given public interest and social expectations of water management.

In April 2026, the NSW Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) put forward a revised methodology to discern WaterNSW regulated river customer cost shares.

IPART state: *“We propose to revise our economic considerations for cost shares by assessing who is causally responsible for future costs. Where causal responsibility cannot be clearly attributed, we will consider a range of outcomes between a lower bound comprising the avoidable cost of the rural bulk water service and an upper bound comprising the standalone cost of the rural bulk water service.”* (page 106)

To do this IPART propose to adopt a 2-step approach to cost allocation:

1. “Assessing whether the forward-looking costs can be avoided in a world where WaterNSW’s customers ceased consumptive use”, then



2. “Allocating costs based on whether the cost is avoidable or common. Avoidable costs are allocated to WaterNSW’s customers. Common costs are shared between WaterNSW’s customers and the NSW Government.”

IPART have also sought to exclude activities undertaken for the Government by establishing a Government Service Activity, with a proposed 7.5% of WaterNSW efficient operating expenditure to be allocated to this activity, covered 100% by Government (page 99).

We believe these revised approaches support NWI Clause 67. These changes are supported in principle by water users. We consider that the revisions improve the ability to recognise and allocate costs to all beneficiaries of WaterNSW activities. However, there is much work to be done in the application of this approach to current cost-share activities, and we have requested for IPART to engage with stakeholders with ‘case study discussions’ to workshop implementation of the revised framework.

Funding of the NSW Non-Urban Metering Framework

In 2025, the NSW Government launched the Telemetry Uplift Program, with \$10.5 million funding from the Australian Government. This program seeks to help water users in the Murray-Darling Basin with entitlement of 100ML or more achieve metering compliance. Eligible water users can opt-in to the program and receive free-telemetry device and installation before mid-2027. When fully subscribed, this program could help 2,500 inland water users.

In February 2026, NSW-DCCEEW announced a second option under the Telemetry Uplift Program in the form of a cashback scheme. Water users can use their own DQP to receive between \$1000-\$2000 cashback depending on the date of LID installation. This provides further support and incentive for eligible water users.

Unfortunately, coastal water users are not eligible to apply for the Telemetry Uplift Program. Since the inception of the Metering Framework, financial support programs for telemetry have not been offered to the NSW Coast, where 3,193 works will be required to comply with telemetry requirements by 1 December 2026.

Coastal water users are typically smaller in entitlement volume yet are required to pay similar costs to inland water users for telemetry installation. This makes complying with metering requirements a costly endeavour. During meetings and in online FAQ documents, NSW-DCCEEW has suggested that coastal water users consider accessing the NSW Drought Infrastructure Fund and take out a loan to access funds to cover the cost of a telemetry system. This is not an appropriate alternative option; coastal water users should not have to take out a loan to afford telemetry installation. All around the state, the cost of compliance is edging water users out of irrigation, accessing a loan to pay for a telemetry system increases financial pressure while providing minimal gain for coastal water users.



Risk Assignment Framework

The principles in the Risk Assignment Framework (NWI clauses 46-51) are critical to protecting the integrity of property rights of water entitlements. NSWIC submits that the Risk Assignment Framework is poorly applied in practice and lacks the supporting architecture to be effective. Governments are incrementally eroding reliability without sufficient regard to the NWI's risk assignment protections.

Compensation provisions in the Water Management Act are designed to favour the Government. This is neither surprising nor improper given that sovereign risk is an inherent feature of any regulatory framework. However, this asymmetry means that water users must at minimum have access to reliable, transparent information on how much water has been clawed back from consumptive use if they are to properly manage their own financial and business risks.

NSW-DCCEEW does not publish systematic records of how much water has been removed from each water source in response to policy changes, new scientific evidence, or other drivers. Nor does it clearly disclose how changes have affected reliability under successive water sharing plans. This lack of transparency undermines the intent of clause 40(iii) of the National Water Initiative (NWI), to which NSW is a signatory, which requires regular public reporting on the implementation of water sharing plans so that water users can anticipate risk and adjust their operations accordingly.

Maintaining transparent records of water recovered from the consumptive pool is critical on several fronts. It allows water users to:

- track reductions in their reliability and incorporate this into farm business planning,
- meet their due diligence requirements when dealing with banks and financiers, and
- hold government accountable for circumstances where compensation obligations under the WM Act may be enlivened and payable.

Just as government rightly demands accountability for the expenditure of public funds on purchasing environmental water, water users are entitled to accountability in how their reliability has been affected over time. Without such transparency, the compensation framework risks becoming a hollow safeguard that is technically available in law but practically inaccessible.

The absence of an agreed metric or methodology to measure reliability, no systematic baseline data against which to assess changes, and lacking reporting obligations are leading causes for poor implementation. Significant improvements are required for the risk assignment framework to be operationalised effectively in practice.

NSWIC is concerned that Governments have introduced policy changes over time with a haircut approach (i.e., less than three percent reductions). These have cumulative impacts on entitlement reliability but have so far avoided compensation. We currently see potential for this to be realised through a number of NSW-DCCEEW/MDBA programs and reviews including:

- Water Sharing Plan reviews
- NSW Northern Basin Connectivity Project
- Minimum Inflows Project
- Coastal Sustainable Extraction Project (scope has changed to be statewide)



- Menindee Lakes Project

A reduction in the reliability of a water entitlement is in effect, an erosion of a water property right, and undermines the integrity of the water management framework. Policy settings eroding reliability must not be a means of reducing water use. The impact of rules-based changes and the risk assignment framework was noted as a considerable issue in a recent NSW Parliamentary Inquiry.³

3. NSW reform priorities from 2026-2028

Risk Assignment Framework

The Risk Assignment Framework is critical to protecting the integrity of property rights of water entitlements. The Risk Assignment Framework is poorly applied in practice and lacks the supporting architecture to be effective. Water users must, at minimum, have access to transparent, accurate and credible information on how much water has been taken back from consumptive use if they are to properly manage their own financial and business risks.

NSWIC recommends improving the supporting architecture for delivering on the principles of the risk assignment framework:

- NSW-DCCEEW to publish and maintain records of annual volumes of water purchased, returned or taken from each specific water source in each water sharing plan over each 12-month period, providing transparency on these volumes.
- NSW-DCCEEW to publish an annual assessment of the cumulative impacts of water reforms (i.e., policy decisions and river operation changes) on the reliability and security of water property rights.
- For any proposed water policy change, NSW-DCCEEW to provide a Reliability Impact Assessment during consultation, describing explicit impacts to water users and intended impact mitigation/compensation.
- Water Sharing Plans (WPS) to specify, or at least include in supporting documents, the metrics relevant to that WSP to determine the baseline for reliability.

Water pricing and cost-sharing allocations

Water pricing in NSW is regulated by the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART). NSWIC considers that IPART's proposed cost allocation approach and creation of the government service activity are steps in the right direction to achieve more appropriate water pricing and cost-recovery. Both proposals improve the cost-recovery process by increasing public contributions to some water management activities, recognising the diffuse impactors, and the public good benefits to the community and government.

NSWIC have recommended that IPART:

³ [NSW Legislative Assembly, Impacts of the Water Amendment \(Restoring our Rivers\) Act 2023 on NSW Regional Communities](#)



- Adopt the revised cost sharing framework, noting its improved approach to recognising the broad range of drivers and beneficiaries for WaterNSW activities.
- IPART and WaterNSW to hold workshops to further discuss practical case studies on how to implement the revised cost sharing framework.
- Establish the new cost share activity “government service activity” with 100% government share.
- Allocate at minimum 10% of WaterNSW efficient operating expenditure to the government service activity, noting the increased volume and rate of reform currently impacting water users.

As this relates to the Productivity Commission, it is clear that full cost recovery for water services does not work and in fact burdens water users with paying for public goods that benefit everyone. The NSWIC submission to IPART’s draft determination for WaterNSW pricing from 1 July 2026, will be submitted as an addendum to this submission.

Water charges are important to irrigation farmers across NSW – they have direct financial impact on irrigators’ business through the cost of producing food and fibre. There is need to recognise what is constraining the industry; water charges are one factor, exacerbated by sustained pressure from rising fuel, fertiliser and supply chain costs.

The operating environment surrounding water planning and management is more uncertain than ever. Customers observe that WaterNSW is increasingly carrying regulatory and policy burdens without corresponding government funding. Non-commercial functions emerging from policy reforms such as fish passage and environmental flow infrastructure are causing WaterNSW expenditure to balloon. This imbalance should not be passed through to customers; the proposed government service activity should be established to pay the costs of these activities.

NSW Non-urban Metering Framework

The NSW irrigation industry supports and has invested heavily in achieving compliance with water metering and measurement requirements. NSW water agencies must continue to appropriately resource and implement recommendations for the NSW Non-urban Metering Framework. Without resolution of barriers beyond the control of water users, the reform is at risk of partial policy failure. Without the resolution of current delivery constraints, the next tranche of water user compliance will fall victim to recognised metering barriers experienced since 2019.

NSWIC recommend the following actions by NSW water agencies to ensure reform delivery constraints are resolved, including:

- Resolution of inconsistencies between all levels of metering policy by 1 December 2026
- Development and strategic implementation of metering education programs
- Strengthening of Duly Qualified Person supply, support and long-term retention
- Review of policy settings pertaining to telemetry requirements
- Strengthening of data quality control procedures and water accounting processes



Conclusion

The challenges outlined in this submission are framed in the experience of water users in NSW. However, the broader issues are not solely NSW-specific operational issues; they raise broader questions regarding the implementation, transparency and institutional integrity of national water reform frameworks. Governments continue to pursue increasingly frequent and complex water reforms, yet maintaining confidence in the underlying governance architecture is critical and requires transparency and a joining of expectations from rural, regional and city-based communities.

Water reform cannot continue at pace and disconnected from state and federal outcomes. It is critical that water reform from here ensures implementation capability, regulatory coherence, transparency and stakeholder consultation are all improved. Sustainable reform depends on water users having confidence that policy changes will be proportionate, evidence-based and accompanied by clear information regarding impacts on entitlement reliability, compliance obligations and cost recovery arrangements.

NSWIC considers that the Productivity Commission has an important role in reinforcing the foundational principles of the National Water Initiative, including secure and transparent water property rights, accountable institutions, efficient pricing frameworks and genuine stakeholder engagement. Strengthening these areas will improve both the legitimacy and long-term durability of Australia's water reform agenda.

NSWIC and its members remain committed to constructive engagement with governments, agencies and regulators to support practical, sustainable and economically responsible water management outcomes. NSWIC and our members are available at your convenience if you have any questions or would like any further information.



NSW Irrigators' Council

The NSW Irrigators' Council (NSWIC) is the peak body representing irrigation farmers and the irrigation farming industry in NSW. Our members include valley water user associations, food and fibre groups, irrigation corporations and commodity groups from the rice, cotton and horticultural industries.

Through our members, NSWIC represents over 12,000 water access licence holders in NSW who access regulated, unregulated and groundwater systems. NSWIC engages in advocacy and policy development on behalf of the irrigation farming sector. As an apolitical entity, the Council provides advice to all stakeholders and decision makers.

Irrigation farmers are stewards of tremendous local, operational and practical knowledge in water management. With more than 12,000 irrigation farmers in NSW, a wealth of knowledge is available. Participatory decision making and extensive consultation ensure this knowledge can be incorporated into best-practice, evidence-based policy.

NSWIC and our members are a valuable way for Governments and agencies to access this knowledge. NSWIC offers the expertise from our network of irrigation farmers and organisations to ensure water management is practical, community-minded, sustainable and follows participatory process.

NSWIC sees this consultation as a valuable opportunity to provide expertise from our membership. Each member reserves the right to independent policy on issues that directly relate to their areas of operation, expertise or any other issues that they deem relevant.

NSW Irrigation Farming

Irrigation farmers in Australia are recognised as world leaders in water efficiency. For example, according to the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment:

“Australian cotton growers are now recognised as the most water-use efficient in the world and three times more efficient than the global average”⁴

“The Australian rice industry leads the world in water use efficiency. From paddock to plate, Australian grown rice uses 50% less water than the global average.”⁵

Our water management legislation prioritises all other users before agriculture (critical human needs, stock and domestic, and the environment), meaning our industry only has water access when all other needs are satisfied. Our industry supports and respects this order of prioritisation. Many common crops we produce are annual/seasonal crops that can be grown in wet years, and not grown in dry periods, in tune with Australia's variable climate.

Irrigation farming in Australia is also subject to strict regulations to ensure sustainable and responsible water use. This includes all extractions being capped at a sustainable level, a hierarchy of water access priorities, and strict measurement requirements.

⁴ <https://www.agriculture.gov.au/ag-farm-food/crops/cotton>

⁵ <https://www.agriculture.gov.au/ag-farm-food/crops/rice>