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## **MURRAY REGIONAL WATER STRATEGY DRAFT SUBMISSION**

### **Executive Summary**

If left unchanged this draft does little to protect the security of NSW Murray General Security irrigators and staple food production for our nation. Instead, it prioritises water for towns and the environment which while is important, shouldn't be the only desired outcome of this strategy. The opportunity for environmental outcomes delivered through irrigation have once again been completely ignored by this draft.

SRI does not support a reduction in NSW MGS in any shape or form (including investigating water access license conversion) as this would devastate our towns, our communities and the economic prosperity of our nation. A successful RWS would have resulted in proper consultation across all water user groups and a different draft to the one we have before us today.

### **BACKGROUND**

Southern Riverina Irrigators are a peak farming body representing 1800 farming families producing \$6 billion in staple food production across dairy, grain, livestock, fodder production and horticulture. Our farmers are licensed and metered to receive NSW Murray general security (NSW MGS) allocation, delivered by Murray Irrigation, the largest privately owned irrigation delivery company in Australia.

Agriculture underpins the success of our economy, our rural towns, our communities and the environment and yet over the last two decades, NSW MGS allocation reliability has reduced from 84 per cent to 52 per cent. This impacts on our ability to produce food for the nation and drive the economy and in an ever increasing unstable world environment, prioritising staple food production has never been more important.

Irrigation also supports on farm bio-diversity and enables development of micro wetlands and tree plantations.



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## STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

NSW Government quote;

1. 'We recognise the most effective way to successfully manage water is by collaborating with our stakeholders and the greater community' and
2. 'We have prepared this draft strategy to continue our discussions with you about the future management of water in your community, it has been prepared in consultation with local council and aboriginal communities'.

As a significant user of NSW MGS and in line with the above government comments, SRI wish to again express their disgust over the failure to actively consult with key stakeholders who are significant users of NSW MGS and will be negatively impacted by the RWS.

## FEEDBACK ON THE MURRAY REGIONAL WATER STRATEGY

SRI support protection of cultural water and values however we feel this is best delivered via environmental allocation and not through additional purchases of productive water.

At all costs we must avoid a RWS based on a worst case climatic scenario. To do so is foolish and irresponsible and will impact on our annual ability to produce food and result in a negative impact for our nation.

A successful RWS would support intelligent and balanced water use and encourage allocation and flow shares to develop a wide range of sustainable irrigated crop and industries to underpin the wealth of our communities. Understanding population and land use trends are key to this success.

Reviewing the allocation and accounting process has the potential to deliver positive change to NSW MGS however for this to be successful it would require a level of transparency and accountability we have little faith NSW DPIE would be able to deliver.

Equally important is a wet year policy for the periods of time when the river is in flood. As evidenced by this season, we had a Murray River running at continually high levels with extended periods of supplementary access available, however this could not be capitalised on because we had reached capacity on our supplementary license.



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## FACTS

1. The Murray-Darling Basin Agreement and the Murray Darling Basin Plan have led to major inequities in Southern Basin water management. NSWMGs has incurred increased negative impacts because of basin agreement requirements to South Australia and changes to inflows from the Northern Basin.
2. As stated in the National Water Initiative 2004 and Water Act 2007 it is imperative a federal water registry is brought online to state unambiguously the ownership of the water entitlement. This has been legislated since 2004 and is yet to be delivered.
3. 75 per cent of all MDB buybacks have occurred in the Southern Basin while collectively these valleys have never breached sustainable caps from 93/94 through to 2007 - the premise of federal water reform.

## KEY MESSAGING

For water management to be successful in the future we must start with accurate and transparent data. How can we have a successful RWS when data is only modelled and based on an unlikely worst case 'dry' scenario and doesn't take into consideration our full range of climatic conditions from dry scenario through to wet. Assumptions create and enforce conservatism and are leading to significant system underuse which ultimately increases costs and reduces output and put the productive capacity of NSWMGs at risk.

## HOW DO WE PROTECT NSWMGs IN THE FUTURE?

1. No further buybacks from the productive sector, outright or for efficiency projects.
2. Clearly define trading zones. Develop and apply exchange rates to water traded into different trading zones to ensure delivery losses are not socialised to users with permanent entitlements but to the individual demanding water at specific location. This must be published transparently to notify businesses of delivery risks associated with expanded or greenfield developments.
3. If constraints are lifted it must be for targeted environmental watering events only and not for consumptive use downstream (i.e., watering 45,000ha of almonds).
4. Actually sit down and consult with representative groups, industry and the wider community of the Riverina, including SRI who have so far been ignored by this process.