

# **NSW Water Reforms: Environment needs a FAIR share**

**Date:** 23 April 2004

## **NATURE CONSERVATION COUNCIL OF NSW INLAND RIVERS NETWORK AUSTRALIAN CONSERVATION FOUNDATION**

Environment groups today united to express grave concern about Minister Craig Knowles' proposed directions in his water reform package. The proposed reforms give farmers permanent and tradeable water rights and place limits on the ability of Government to make improvements to river health without compensation.

NCC Executive Officer Brooke Flanagan said "The Knowles package simply cannot deliver a fair deal for stressed rivers like those in the Murray Darling basin. With all the benefits flowing to irrigators from new, perpetual water rights and liberalised water markets, we are calling for a fair deal - a quid pro quo for the environment.

"We propose a 10% 'efficiency' dividend on water users - a 10% reduction to all water allocations in stressed river catchments phased over each 10 year water plan, and for this to continue until the rivers are healthy" ACF spokesperson Tim Fisher said, "Overall, current methods used in irrigated agriculture continue to waste a lot of water. We think that a 1% annual improvement in efficiency is a reasonable contribution from irrigators towards restoring rivers to health.

"Obviously some rivers, like the Murray and Macquarie for instance, need much more water over a faster timeframe. This is where public investment comes in to share in the costs of change," said Ms Flanagan.

"Increased certainty for irrigators must come with certainty for our rivers. A key test of both the National Water Initiative and this legislation is whether stressed rivers are returned to health over the ten year life of the plan," Mr Fisher said.

"Minister Knowles' current proposals on water plans and cost sharing do little or nothing to guarantee that water is returned to the environment and rivers are restored to health' said Mr Fisher.

IRN Co-ordinator Brendan Fletcher said, "These adjustments would not be subject to compensation, but can obviously work in tandem with publicly funded programs of water acquisition in rivers like the Murray, where we clearly need the flexibility to move faster."

"The Murray needs 1500Gl over the next 10 years and so we are proposing that highly stressed systems would have faster rates of change supported by structural adjustment and compensation funding," said Mr Fletcher.

### **Contacts:**

Brooke Flanagan, NCC Executive Officer 0407 201 917

Tim Fisher, ACF Land & Water Co-ordinator 0409 004 651

Brendan Fletcher, IRN Coordinator 0407 279 088