

State's \$26M hurry-up on water reforms

Date: 25 January 2005

The Federal Government's decision to suspend \$26 million in national competition payments to New South Wales because of the Carr Government's failure to provide adequate environmental flows to rivers is a wake-up call that must be urgently acted upon, say environmental groups.

"This decision only confirms what is apparent from declining waterbird numbers, struggling native fish populations and parched river red gums - our rivers and wetlands are dying from government inaction," said Brendan Fletcher, Coordinator for the Inland Rivers Network.

In its most recent assessment, the Competition Council recommended a 10 per cent suspension (approximately \$26 million) of NSW's 2005 payment because of the State's unwillingness to demonstrate that its approach to water allocations represents an appropriate trade-off between environmental and other objectives.

NSW was the only state penalised by the National Competition Council for failing to provide adequate flows to the environment.

"For years our rivers and wetlands have suffered because the Carr Government has been dragging its feet on environmental flows - and now the State Budget is suffering because of this government's environmental failures," said Rachael Young, Water Policy Officer for the Nature Conservation Council of NSW.

NSW can recover the \$26 million lost if it takes action to improve its record before the 2005 assessment of water reform progress. The 2005 assessment will be carried out by the newly formed National Water Commission.

"Losing \$26 million in national competition payments is the wake-up call this government needs," said Mr. Fletcher. "The government must act now, not later, to recover water for the environment."

"The Carr Government must respond by improving the current water sharing plans and developing serious, science-based strategies for providing water to key wetlands and rivers," said Ms Young.

For more information, contact:

Brendan Fletcher, Coordinator, Inland Rivers Network
ph: (02) 9212 5112 mob: 0407 279 088

Rachael Young, Water Policy Officer, Nature Conservation Council NSW
ph: (02) 9279 0955 mob: 0425 284 573