

Media Release

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State Government's Drought-proofing Tasmania Program in disarray – TCT calls on the Prime Minister to withhold funding.

The Secretary of the Department of Treasury and Finance Don Challen has been reported in today's Mercury newspaper as saying there is a lack of rigorous analysis or strategy behind the State Government's Drought-proofing Tasmania Program.

"Mr Challen's comments reported in the Mercury are no surprise to the TCT as we have been trying for six months without success to get the Government to justify the direction it is taking with irrigation development," said TCT Acting Director Peter McGlone.

"We have not got answers to why the State Government wants to invest \$220 million into twelve 'drought-proofing' projects mainly in the north-east but have largely ignored the parched south-east. There appears to be no justification for why these twelve projects have been selected over others," Mr McGlone added.

"We cannot understand why the government is rushing to open up new areas to irrigation, such as the Midlands, rather than support existing irrigation areas to expand their production. Such a policy would have prevented the Coal Valley irrigators reaching critically low water levels last summer".

"The government must reassess its role in water development. While the Macquarie River irrigators have been able to fund their own water pipeline and have it running in 18 months, the Government's Meander Dam, completed in February 2008, still has not provided water for a single crop?"

"It seems like research and policy is always trailing a long way behind the State Government's decision-making and unless this changes we will undoubtedly see money wasted on irrigation projects built in areas that are not in the greatest need, will not have water to supply them and cause avoidable environmental damage."

The Australian Government's Minister for Climate Change and Water, Penny Wong, has not yet reached an agreement on provision of funding for the Drought-proofing Tasmania Program and has advised the TCT that a sound business and environmental case must be provided before a project will be funded. "Given the damning assessment by the head of the Tasmanian Treasury, the TCT calls on the Prime Minister to indefinitely withhold his government's funding for the Drought-proofing Tasmania projects until questions over economic viability and environmental sustainability are fully addressed."

"The TCT calls on both the Australian and Tasmanian Governments to take a more cautious, consultative, science based approach to water development and urges them to re-assess the priorities under the Drought-Proofing Tasmania Program."

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