

Media Release

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National Water Commission report highlights Tasmanian Government's failure to deliver water management plans – irrigation funding may be at risk

The Tasmanian Conservation Trust today claimed a report by the National Water Commission found the Tasmanian Government is the worst performing of all the states and territories in developing water management plans. The TCT claims this failure may put at risk Australian Government funding for irrigation, create uncertainty for water users and threaten the environment.

According to the Australian Water Commission report 'Australian Water Reform 2009: Second biennial assessment of progress in implementation of the National Water Initiative', released on 9 October 2009, the Tasmanian Government has not met agreed targets in relation to finalising water management plans by the end of 2009 and has made no progress over the last two years. This information is listed in Chapter 1, Table 2, page 19 of the report. The Australian Water Reform 2009 report is the Commission's two-yearly assessment of progress in implementing the National Water Initiative (NWI) – the blueprint for water reform that was agreed to by the Australian Government and state and territory governments in 2004. Under the NWI, statutory water management plans should be developed for all surface water and groundwater management units in which entitlements are issued (NWI clause 36). The Australian Water Reform 2009 is available from: <http://www.nwc.gov.au/www/html/7-home-page.asp>

“The Tasmanian Government made the commitment (listed in its NWI implementation plan) to complete water management plans for 11 catchments by the end of 2009, but the National Water Commission's report found only five plans have been done,” said TCT Director Peter McGlone.

“To make things worse, the number of completed water management plans has not changed since the Commission's last review in 2007. While the Commission says all states and territories were slow in finalising water management plans, only Tasmania failed to make progress since the last review in 2007.

“In the government's rush to develop ill-conceived irrigation schemes they have dropped the ball on water management planning. The Commission's report suggests this may put at risk Australian Government funding of Tasmanian irrigation projects.”

The Commission's report states the failure of the Tasmanian Government to commit to completing water management plans prior to obtaining Commonwealth approval for major irrigation projects 'may be relevant to the provision of Commonwealth funding for new irrigation developments' ('Australian Water Reform 2009', page 19).

“The TCT interpretes this statement by the Commission as a guarded warning to the Tasmanian Government that funding for irrigation projects may be withheld if there isn’t improvement in water management planning.

“This is an embarassing failure by Minister for Primary Industries and Water David Llewellyn and puts at risk the State Government’s plans to turn Tasmania into Australia’s food bowl.

“Minister Llewellyn may believe that water management planning inhibits development, but the Commission’s report says the oposite. The Commission warns that failure to deliver on water management plans creates uncertainty for water users as well as threatening the environment.”

The Commission’s report states that:

‘Water plans are fundamental to water management, transparently establishing the intended balance between environmental and consumptive use outcomes...’ (page 14).

The Commission’s report also says that the absence of water management plans affects water users as well as the environment. The report says:

‘The Commission is strongly of the view that the absence of statutory plans creates uncertainty for water users and can jeopardize the sustainable management of water systems. In some cases, the absence of a water plan also delays the potential introduction of water trading.’ (page 20)

The TCT calls on Minister Llewellyn to:

- make a firm commitment to delivering all water management plans required under the NWI by a realistic date;
- commit the funding required to deliver water management plans; and
- promise not to seek Australian Government approvals for irrigation projects until water management plans are in place for all catchments.

Further information:

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