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Socio-economic impacts of Basin Plan too big to ignore until after Election

NSW Farmers' Association is calling on all major political parties to comment on the Stubbs Report issued today and provide the Murray Darling Basin Plan (MDBP) with the attention it deserves prior to the Federal Election on 21 August.

NSW Farmers' Association President Charles Armstrong said today's report by Dr Judith Stubbs confirms the Association's long-held fears about the devastating impacts on farm families and rural communities of permanent water reductions.

"The key socio-economic findings of the report mirror the emerging trends of the Association's Basin Plan survey, particularly with respect to expected job losses and population drift out of key farming areas," Mr Armstrong said.

Current NSW Farmers' Association survey results show that three in four farmers are worried about their farm debt to equity ratio should reductions in water entitlements be implemented.

"One in four would exit agriculture altogether if the Basin Plan fails to deliver the water necessary to continue farming under their current system," Mr Armstrong said.

"Generations of farming history will be lost if the socio-economic impacts of this Plan are not addressed, as more than 40 percent of respondent families to our survey to date have been farming in their local region for more than 100 years," Mr Armstrong said.

"The Association has been continually calling on the Murray Darling Basin Authority to dramatically improve its assessment and management of socio-economic impacts of the yet to be released draft Basin Plan," Mr Armstrong said.

"It is essential that due consideration is given to the production value of water, and the jobs and communities that depend on irrigation for their existence. Governments like to talk about their commitment to regional development and decentralisation – it is time that they woke up to the fact that taking water from agriculture will significantly accelerate rural decline and loss of rural population in NSW and threatens our ability to feed the 90 million people that we feed."

"We reiterate our calls for the Federal Government to stop hiding behind the tenuous excuse of caretaker provisions and release the plain-English version of the draft Plan, before Election Day," Mr Armstrong said.

"The present threats regarding major cut backs to irrigation water have placed a black cloud over our community's future and this must be debated during this election campaign," Mr Armstrong concluded.

Farmers across the Basin have until Sunday 29 August 2010 to complete the survey, which is available at <http://www.nswfarmers.org.au/surveys/mdb>.

More information regarding the Association's Federal Election policy position on the MDBP can be found at NSW Farmers' Association Federal Election Website www.nswfarmers.org.au/federal_election/home

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