

Media Release 28 May 2018

SELF-SUPPLY WATER USERS WANT A FAIR GO TO PRODUCE FOOD

Food producers have requested the Minister for Water reopen fourteen sub-catchments of the Donnelly and Warren Rivers, closed to issue of new water licences for self-supply to unfairly favour the proposed Southern Forests Irrigation Scheme needing \$59 million in public subsidy.

The Manjimup and Pemberton Landowners (MPL) group say the Southern Forests Irrigation Scheme has twice failed to attract \$40 million subsidy under the National Water Infrastructure Development Fund and food production must revert to the proven water self-supply model. The combined \$19 million State and \$40 million Federal subsidy sought would have been an average \$840,000 public subsidy for each of the 70 participants in the proposed Irrigation Scheme.

The group representing self-supply water users has made their request in a 'Log of Claims' letter sent to Minister for Water, Dave Kelly.

The letter requests the Minister direct the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation to:

- Issue water licenses for self-supply water in the eight sub-catchments of the Donnelly River closed to licensing in November 2017. MPL say there is 9.211 gigalitres of water available in the relevant sub-catchments based on the *Warren-Donnelly surface water allocation plan (2012)*, at November 2017.
- Accept applications for water licences in the six sub-catchments of the Donnelly and Warren Rivers closed to licensing in November 2017 because of full allocation. MPL say these sub-catchments were unnecessarily closed with only 15% to 42% of mean annual stream flow allocated to agriculture.

MPL convener, Neil Bartholomaeus said there was no opportunity for public comment before the sudden closure in November 2017 of water catchments vital for self-supply; causing frustration and anxiety for food producers who want to construct new dams with their private funds.

"The water rights of food producers in the eight sub-catchments of the Donnelly River must be restored without delay.

"In general, the low allocations of water to agriculture versus the environment are choking growth in food production.

"Where land is zoned 'Priority agriculture' in planning schemes, up to 70% of mean annual stream flow should be allocated to agriculture.

'Two thirds of the area of the catchments of the Donnelly and Warren Rivers is State Forest, national park and nature reserve, providing environmental water for the rivers, Mr Bartholomaeus said.

MPL also said in their letter they are alarmed at the Minister's intention to introduce water licence fees of \$6,668 for renewal of a licence and \$13,057 for a new dam licence. The new fees from 1 July 2018 are to initially apply in the mining and public water supply sectors with application to agriculture to be considered early in 2018-2019.

Mr Bartholomaeus said the State Government was using a 'divide and conquer' approach to introduction of the unjustified fees.

"\$6,668 to renew a water licence by what is usually a simple 'rubber stamp' administrative process is an outrageous water tax grab.

'MPL are asking the Opposition and cross bench in the Legislative Council to oppose regulations for the high fees, before they are also applied to food producers,' Mr Bartholomaeus said.

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