

Australian Government signs off on a National Water Initiative Intergovernmental Agreement

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At a landmark meeting in 2004, most state and territory governments and the Australian government signed off on a National Water Initiative (NWI) Intergovernmental Agreement that became the blueprint for changing the way Australia manages its water. In March 2005 the Australian Government created the National Water Commission, an independent authority, to drive this reform of water management.

The Commission advises the Prime Minister and state and territory governments on national water issues and also administers two key programmes under the \$2 billion Australian Government Water Fund.

As part of its role the Commission works closely with state and territory governments to help them to meet actions and commitments under the NWI. The NWI is aimed at expanding water markets for greater permanent trade in water, promoting more flexible and profitable water use, improving planning and accounting and improving the way water is allocated, used and managed for

environmental outcomes. Many of the objectives of the NWI are relevant for farmers, irrigators and those living in rural Australia. The irrigation sector is one group that the Commission is working closely with to inform them of how the NWI might impact on them and also how they can assist in the national water reform process.

Water reform, as outlined in the NWI, is important to ensure we manage our water resources better so that we are able to deal with the challenges of drought, climate change, seasonal variability, river health, salinity, water pricing and over allocated water systems. With the guidance of the Commission, these issues, and many others, can be addressed holistically.

Supporting this blueprint for reform, the Australian Government has invested \$2 billion through the Australian Government Water Fund (AGWF) to improve water infrastructure and the management and understanding of Australia's water resources. This is done through three

programmes, two of which are managed by the Commission – Water Smart Australia and Raising National Water Standards. The Commission is continuing to work with the irrigation sector to engage irrigators in the Water Smart Australia programme. A third programme, Community Water Grants, is administered jointly by the Australian Government Department of Environment and Heritage, and the Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry.

Productively managing our water resources – through effective collaboration across governments and investment in improved water management practices – is essential to our continued economic growth and regional development and is one of the greatest conservation challenges facing Australia.

The National Water Commission will continue to work with governments, industry and communities to meet this challenge. Further information on the Commission is available from www.nwc.gov.au