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Claims NSW irrigators will get more water from Murray-Darling Basin – just plain wrong

NSW Water Commissioner, David Harriss, said today that stories circulating in South Australian media claiming NSW irrigators would be allowed more water from the Murray-Darling Basin were misleading and wrong.

“The NSW Government is not introducing any rules that allow licensed water users in unregulated streams within the NSW Murray-Darling Basin to increase extraction by 10 per cent – any suggestion otherwise is nonsense,” said Mr Harriss.

“Across the NSW Murray-Darling Basin, statutory water sharing plans have been introduced that collectively reduce the long term extractions below the level agreed through the cap on diversions in 1995.”

“The truth of the matter is that an independent audit has shown that NSW has used some 3,500 gigalitres less than it has been entitled to do since cap accounting commenced.”

Mr Harriss said the articles had prompted calls from both South Australian and Victorian water colleagues who were just as confused about the origin of the information and the false claims being made.

“The suggestion that NSW is allowing unlimited diversions of floodwaters to dams at the expense of downstream users is also wrong.”

“In fact, when the first floodwaters arrived in the Darling River in 2009-10, after a very long drought, NSW chose to allow much of this water to pass to the lower lakes in South Australia to address environmental issues. This could have been diverted to the Menindee Lakes for storage.”

“The reality is that water users on unregulated rivers in NSW are limited by volumetric entitlement rules, which are linked to specific flow levels dictating when users may commence to pump or when they must cease to pump.”

“These volumes are correlated either by direct metering or through pumping records and electricity usage.”

Mr Harriss said another interesting fact is that while 56 per cent of the Murray-Darling Basin is in NSW and 65 per cent of the flows are generated in NSW rivers and streams - NSW only diverts about 53 per cent of total diversions, which is proportionally reduced in dry years.

“There can be no suggestion that NSW will take more water from the Murray-Darling Basin and has ignored South Australian water users – this is not only extremely misleading, but ignores the cooperation between States that got us through the recent drought,” Mr Harriss said.

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