



Tuesday 20 July 2010

A sustainable Australia threatened by new Murray Darling Basin plan

The Prime Minister's federal election policy of developing regional towns and cities through affordable housing is admirable, but doomed to failure if jobs are lost through mandatory cuts to irrigation entitlements and less food production in the Murray Darling Basin.

That was a key message delivered to the Federal leader of the National Party, Warren Truss, in Mildura yesterday, on the eve of the release of the Murray Darling Basin Plan discussion paper.

But today's news that the Basin Plan won't be released until after the election has severely curtailed the democratic right of industry groups like Citrus Australia to debate its contents.

CEO Judith Damiani said the election campaign was the ideal platform for debating the discussion paper with both sides of politics, and now that important democratic process had been taken away.

"This outrageous delay will only heighten the anxiety and uncertainty being felt by our irrigator members across the Basin who fear significant cuts to their entitlements," Ms Damiani said.

"This is certainly not a good way to boost regional towns and cities for a 'sustainable Australia'," she said.

"Without the Plan being released how can the country's political leaders develop a policy on what's proposed?" Ms Damiani said.

She said despite the delayed release, Citrus Australia would press on with its call for party policies which encouraged industry competitiveness and productivity, including;

Water

- Recognise citrus as a permanent long-lead crop requiring high security irrigation water all year round, and the importance of the industry to the national economy and well-being.
- Commitment to current funding for infrastructure upgrades and buyback

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- Commit that any mandatory cuts to irrigation entitlements will be minimised and fully compensated.
- Recognise that the proposed Murray Darling Basin plan will have tremendous social and economic impacts in a region that produces 90% of Australia's oranges and nearly all of Australia's fresh orange juice.
- Increase funding for water-use efficiency programs outside the Murray Darling basin

Export Market Access, Development and Promotion

- Improve and fast-track quarantine and tariff market access into key countries such as China, Republic of Korea, Japan, Thailand, Indonesia and USA.
- Commit to retain the 40% export inspection fee rebate until reforms demonstrate equivalent savings and efficiencies.
- Recognise the importance of horticultural trade in bilateral and multilateral trade negotiations and Free Trade Agreements.
- Support industry capacity building and promotions programs in export and domestic markets.

Quarantine and Biosecurity reform

- Commit to improving biosecurity and quarantine systems that increase the competitiveness and ensure the ongoing viability of the Australian citrus industry.
- Support increased training and surveillance for exotic and endemic pests
- Support increased awareness and education.
- Provide more clarity around owner reimbursement costs for incursions.
- Support information and analysis obtained from pre-border, border and post-border biosecurity activities be made available for use by state and territory governments, industry and research organisations.
- Enhance government funding for activities which support biosecurity-related technical market access.



- Support the implementation of the national fruit fly strategy.

Research and Development

- Commit to ongoing support for matching agricultural R&D.

Workplace Relations

- Recognise the citrus industry as labour intensive, and a major employer in regional and rural Australia.
- Commit to ensuring an effective nationally targeted education campaign for horticulturists as the new Horticulture Award is implemented.
- Commit to ensuring a successful Pacific seasonal worker pilot scheme.

Horticulture Code of Conduct

- Commit to reviewing the performance of the current mandatory Horticulture Code of Conduct with the view of taking immediate action on the outcomes.

Climate Change

- Recognise the citrus industry as an efficient user of water with a light environmental footprint.
- Support for increased government grants and R&D into adaptation, biosecurity and value chain strategies that address climate variability, improve energy efficiency and reduce direct emissions.

Truth in Labelling

- Increase consumer awareness of country of origin – Australian produced/grown.
- Encourage support and compliance of the voluntary fruit juice industry code of practice.

ENDS



Citrus Australia Ltd is the national peak body for citrus growers. Citrus Australia represents the industry in policy and advocacy, biosecurity, market access, development and promotion, research, and communications. The citrus industry in Australia is worth \$540 million and represents the interests of around 2000 citrus growers. It is the largest fresh fruit exporter, with annual export earnings of around \$190 million.

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