



# CENTRAL DARLING SHIRE COUNCIL

February 28, 2024

## **Wilcannia long-term water security under threat with new weir design**

Central Darling Shire Council, General Manager, Greg Hill, has advised Council that the “possible reality” is that the Wilcannia weir will never be completed unless plans for a short-sighted redesign are scrapped and federal and state governments provide more money.

The project is being undertaken by the NSW Department of Planning and Environment (DPIE) and funded by the federal and state governments.

“The community has been waiting almost 50 years for a new weir to give long-term water security. It is a priority project for Council and the community,” Mr Hill said.

In the 1970’s a new weir at Wilcannia was identified as necessary for long-term town water supply. In October 2019, the federal and state Coalition parties announced combined funding of \$30-million for the weir replacement, with expected completion in 2021. By 2022 the forecasted cost for the work was to be \$45 million. In 2024 the community is still waiting to see work start.

“From 2019 to now, nearly five years has passed. There have been four different water ministers, change of state and federal government leadership, drought, several major floods, and the Covid-19 pandemic, which has significantly delayed the project,” Mr Hill said.

In a report to the February Council Meeting Mr Hill outlined serious concerns about the status of the project specifically the implications as a result of DPIE proposing to redesign the weir. This is despite the community adopting the weir design in 2022 after significant consultation.

“The proposed redesign will significantly impact the community. The original design estimated a five-year sustainable water supply. The redesign, with a height reduction, puts this under question. It is believed these proposed changes are fundamentally based on cost,” Mr Hill said.

Central Darling Shire Council Administrator, Bob Stewart, said the situation was unacceptable.

“It is outrageous that our community can sign off on a project two years previous and that now we hear it is in jeopardy, or will be a shadow of its’ former self, most likely because of bureaucratic bean-counting, at a time when water security is of the highest importance,” Mr Stewart said.

Mr Hill said if there was no redesign and work started immediately, it was likely the weir could be completed by 2026. However, further consultation and design will take time, and increase costs.

“We’ve already seen the cost go from \$30-million (2019) to \$45-million (2022) because it’s taken too long to start work. The longer it’s delayed the more the costs will go up and the less likely we will see it completed. We need the federal and state governments to contribute additional funds to the project now and start work immediately,” Mr Hill said.

Mr Stewart will be meeting with DPIE representatives this afternoon (February 28) and further meetings haven’t been ruled out as Council lobbies on behalf of the community. Ends

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