



Refund for water fees: Kobelke

DANIEL EMERSON

WA Water Resources Minister John Kobelke conceded yesterday that he would have to refund water licence fees and come up with a new system as it was revealed that Federal Environment Minister Malcolm Turnbull had asked the National Water Commission to scrutinise the licences.

Mr Kobelke told the Legislative Assembly he would strive for an "equitable arrangement" after the Greens and Liberals in the Legislative Council blocked the fees.

"I give a commitment to work with all the parties to make sure we are able to put in place a licensing fee arrangement which has a wider level of acceptance," he said. "Clearly we will refund fees to people if there is a variation under the new arrangement."

The fees from \$200 to \$3000 were imposed in July on farmers using 10,800 commercial irrigation bores and dams mainly in the South-West and metropolitan area. Critics said they were disproportionate, a big user paid \$3000 for 335 gigalitres while a farmer in the South-West paid \$1800 for half a gigalitre of water.

Mr Kobelke said a licence fee of some kind was needed to comply with the National Water Initiative.

WA Liberal Senator Mathias Cormann said the fees were irrational, inequitable and unfair. He notified Mr Turnbull who asked the commission if the fees complied with the National Water Initiative. But there may be little the commission could do, fees were a decision of the States.