

Activists speak out over fertiliser, saying Imports 'breach' UN law

By XAVIER DUFF

HUMAN rights activists say fertiliser companies are breaching United Nations sanctions by importing phosphate from a key African supplier.

A group called the Australia Western Sahara Association says imports from the small territory of Western Sahara contravene international law.

AWSA spokeswoman Cate Lewis also said the trade was unethical because of a long-running dispute over the territory's sovereignty.

Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has warned companies to get legal advice before importing products from Western Sahara.

"They should wait until the vote of self determination in Western Sahara, then they will know with who they can buy phosphate and other natural resources," Ms Lewis said.

It is believed fertiliser companies Incitec Pivot, CSBP and Impact all import phosphate rock from Western Sahara, the key ingredient of single superphosphate.

The Australia Western Sahara Association said Morocco, which controls the territory,



Trade warning: Incitec Pivot's Portland plant, which receives phosphate from the Western Sahara.

was illegally mining and selling natural resources that belonged to the Saharawi inhabitants.

Western Sahara is a non self-

governing territory under the control of Morocco which took over the colony after Spain pulled out in 1976.

The Saharawi have been fighting for the right to self determination ever since, backed by the United Nations,

but Morocco has resisted it. The UN had condemned Morocco for selling natural resources from the disputed

territory, Ms Lewis said.

But Incitec Pivot said it was satisfied it was not breaching international law by importing Western Sahara phosphate as it had been doing for 20 years.

"It is relevant to note that the Federal Government has not prohibited importing resources from the Western Sahara," a spokesman said.

The company plans to meet the AWSA to hear its views.

Phosphate rock makes up 60 per cent of the 700,000 tonnes of single superphosphate the company produces each year and Western Sahara was a vital source, he said.

Australian farmers use about 1.3 million tonnes of SSP a year to maintain productivity and international competitiveness.

All Australian SSP manufacturers use at least some rock from the Western Sahara, according to the Incitec Pivot spokesman.

"We are watching the situation very closely. While there are other sources, suitable phosphate rock is found only in a handful of countries and there is pressure on global supplies."

Irrigation charges fall

By PAUL SELLARS

THE average water bill in many irrigation districts across Victoria will be cut as a result of today's final pricing decision by the Essential Services Commission.

The state's five rural water authorities had proposed increasing irrigation charges by up to 6 per cent, plus inflation, in plans submitted to the commission last year.

But the ESC rejected most of those increases in a draft determination in April and today confirmed that, in many cases, the authorities would have to drop prices over the next two years.

Lower Murray Water

will have to cut its rural water prices by an average of 6.6 per cent, excluding inflation, after proposing a 4 per cent increase.

Goulburn Murray Water has also had its plans for an average 2.7 per cent rise knocked back. While prices in some GMW districts will rise, the average tariff will fall by 2.2 per cent, which means once inflation is factored in, it will remain more or less the same.

But ESC chairman Greg Wilson said the average bill in GMW's Campaspe district would fall by 16.6 per cent, which translates to an annual decrease from \$8800 to \$7350 for an irrigator with a 163-megalitre water right.

Mr Wilson said the sizeable fall in Campaspe prices reflected the relatively small amount of short-term maintenance required in the district as well as GMW's decision to stop raising money to fund longer-term capital works.

The average price for customers of Grampians Wimmera Mallee, who had been seeking a 0.6 per cent increase plus inflation, is also set to remain the same.

But First Mildura Irrigation Trust has been granted a small average increase of 0.1 per cent plus inflation.

Southern Rural Water, which had been seeking a 6 per cent increase, will be allowed to raise prices by an average 3.7 per cent.

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