

Media Release



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450 GL on-farm projects continue despite strengthened test

The Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) is calling for the Federal Department of Agriculture and Water Resources to stop acquiring farmers' water to meet the 450GL of upwater that is additional to the Basin Plan.

VFF Water Council Chairman Richard Anderson said the VFF has long argued for the proposed recovery of an additional 450GL to be scrapped.

"It makes no sense for the Government to be pursuing this water"

"The VFF successfully lobbied for a strengthened socio-economic test to assess projects under the 450GL back in December 2018 where politicians committed to firstly pursuing off-farm water saving projects."

"It seems the Federal department is determined to ignore the criteria and advice from politicians at the time," Mr Anderson said.

Since September 2019, six projects have been released for public comment under the new criteria and all have been water savings generated on farms.

"This was not the intent of Ministers in 2018 – it its crazy to be pursuing the 450GL when we don't even know if the water can be delivered to South Australia."

"Basin States are currently working on reports looking into deliverability. The federal Department should be waiting on this information before targeting water that simply cannot get down the Murray River", Mr Anderson said.

Two projects released for public comment this week are in South Australia. Five of the six projects are located in that state.

One project proposes to install netting structures over 33 hectares of citrus and claiming 5ML per hectare of water savings. Practical experience in the Sunraysia suggests that a more realistic saving is 0.5 ML per hectare.

The other project is converting a field nursery into a vineyard. It is very surprising that the Commonwealth is prepared to subsidise farmers' commercial decisions to change from one farming enterprise to a completely different enterprise.

In total, these six on-farm projects have resulted in 480.3 ML less water available to agriculture.

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The proposals lack transparency, total project costs are not provided, nor is the Government funding contribution.

“It’s time the Government gets real with the Basin Plan. Changes need to be made. We cannot continue to pursue the 450GL and these projects should not be supported,” Mr Anderson said.

The VFF has prepared submissions to the Federal Department on these two projects. Public comment closes today.

ENDS

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