

Media Release



Victorian
Farmers
Federation

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Moratorium on irrigation developments required in the Mallee

The Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) is calling on the Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia Governments, in coordination with the Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA), to impose a moratorium on new irrigation developments in the Mallee pending a review of the capacity of the Murray River to meet increasing irrigation demands.

“The growing horticultural industry downstream of the Barmah Choke is changing irrigation demand patterns and increasing the risk of water delivery shortfalls,” said Mr Richard Anderson, VFF Water Chair.

“We need all States to support a moratorium on new irrigation developments while water trading rules and environmental damage from high water flows are reviewed.

“The MDBA is charged with managing water flows down the Murray River, and it’s high time they acknowledge the increasing risk of delivery shortfalls and environmental damage currently occurring to the river.

“In the past, most water used downstream of the Barmah Choke occurred in the Torrumbarry Irrigation area for pasture. Water was used in the spring and autumn for annual pastures, and perennial pastures were irrigated over the summer. Now there is one larger and more sustained peak for irrigating perennial horticulture throughout summer.

“The total volume of water available for irrigation below the Barmah Choke at 100 per cent allocation is 1,439 gigalitres (GL) across Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia.

“However, we estimate that the total water requirement of agriculture in the Victorian Mallee is 780 GL annually. This is over half of the total water available below the Barmah Choke. Similar numbers can be expected for South Australia and New South Wales. Therefore, catastrophic water shortfalls can be expected in the next drought, based on existing demands.

“Forcing the Murray River to flow at full bank is causing bank erosion. The continuous erosion reduces the river’s water carrying capacity as it flows through the Barmah Choke.

“Increased erosion has also been observed along the lower Goulburn River due to the high summer flows needed to transfer water from the Goulburn to the Murray to supply downstream environmental and irrigation demands.

“There is a limit to how much water can be physically delivered downstream. We need this moratorium to investigate new trading rules to protect both irrigators and the environment.

“Irrigators are now experiencing third party impacts because of weak water trading rules that do not properly consider third party and environmental impacts as required by the Basin Water Market and Trading Objectives and Principles in Schedule 3 of the Commonwealth Water Act.

“In the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission’s upcoming review into irrigation water trading, they must address third part impacts of water trading and need for improved trading rules.

“Until the Government reviews the effectiveness of water trading rules, we need the MDBA and State Water Ministers to impose a moratorium on new developments in the Mallee,” said Mr Anderson.

ENDS

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About the VFF

The Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) is dedicated to representing the interests of farmers and making a positive difference to their businesses and communities. We strive to create an environment for our members, our farmers, that enables profitable, safe, sustainable production to ensure an enduring social licence in a community that respects and values the sector.