

Media Release



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Southern Basin cannot wear the pain of the Basin Plan

The Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) is shocked and alarmed that Mick Keelty, Interim Inspector General Murray-Darling has failed to react to the recent decisions of the Queensland and New South Wales Government to allow recent flood waters in the Northern basin to be diverted for consumption.

VFF Water Council Chair, Richard Anderson said, "this recent rain is a first flush for the system and should have been protected to ensure it reached the Southern Basin and Menindee Lakes".

Following the fish deaths of last year, Basin States agreed to establish "first flush" rules to protect water for downstream, yet it seems these rules have been ignored.

In early February Queensland gave permission for irrigators to harvest water that was strongly criticised by the New South Wales Government with the NSW Water Minister calling on Queensland to revoke their decision. Yet a few weeks on and flows now reaching New South Wales they too think it's ok for the pumps to be turned on.

It was recently revealed the New South Wales Government, sought urgent advice from major irrigators on how the recent rainfall might damage their water harvesting infrastructure after the decision was made to lift the pumping embargo.

"This seems like the NSW Government scrambling to justify their decision after it was already made," Mr Anderson said.

There is no transparency about how much water has been allowed to be diverted as a result of the recent announcements by the Queensland and New South Wales Governments and there is no clarity about how the increased diversions comply with the Basin Plan.

While all this has been happening, the interim Inspector-General has been silent and so too has the Murray-Darling Basin Authority. But Mr Keelty has publicised that his role is to improve transparency, accountability and community confidence.

"What is he doing?" Mr Anderson asked.

Over 12 months ago the Productivity Commission identified that Queensland only meter 29 percent of its surface water take and meter 28 percent of its ground water use. Yet the Inspector General's first report on the Northern Basin released in November last year provided no answers or actions to address the lack of metering and compliance in the Northern Basin.

"The inequity of how the Basin Plan is being implemented simply cannot continue, the Northern Basin cannot continue to take water with little or no measurement or compliance", said Mr Anderson.

The VFF is calling on the Interim Inspector General to take his role of improving transparency, accountability and the confidence of both the Southern and Northern Basin community seriously and do his job.

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