

Media Release



Thursday 8 August 2019

Disagreement on Basin Plan disappoints

The release of the Murray Darling Basin Ministerial Council Communiqué three days after the meeting took place shows a high level of disagreement between the Basin States and Commonwealth Governments.

“It is highly unusual for a communiqué to take so long. It appears the States and Commonwealth are unable to agree on how to implement the next steps of the Basin Plan and what the consequences will be,” said Mr Richard Anderson, Chairman of the Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) Water Council.

“Last week, the Commonwealth announced funding for the 450 gigalitre (GL) water recovery. Yet we are not even sure the current amount of water recovered for the environment can actually be delivered down the river.

“The Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) has always said that the Basin Plan is adaptive. It’s time we see real adaptation from the MDBA rather than the continued assertion their modelling from 2012, seven years ago, is still accurate today.

“The States discussed deliverability concerns and agreed to establish an independent expert panel to review the ability of the MDBA to deliver water below the Barmah Choke. However, more urgent action is needed. The other Basin States must follow Victoria’s leadership and call in new or expanded water licences until the deliverability review has been completed.

“It is very disappointing that South Australia, Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory refused to support updating the modelling needed to confirm the practical flow targets for the constraints projects.

“The expert panel review and updating modelling should go hand-in-hand. It makes no sense to continue with constraints projects if we cannot deliver the water we have currently recovered, let alone the water still to be recovered.

“The constraints projects are estimated to deliver 100 to 180 GL towards the Basin Plan’s 2,750 GL recovery target. Yet, carrying out these projects would require more than 3,000 private landholders to agree to their land being flooded and the creation of easements.

“The Northern Basin must also do better. The Communiqué provided no real progress in addressing the serious over development in the Darling system.

“It is also extremely disappointing that the Communiqué said nothing about the Productivity Commission’s most important recommendation; that the timeframes for the 605 GL Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment Mechanism be extended.

“The Productivity Commission described existing timeframes as ‘highly ambitious, if not unrealistic’ in December 2018. To restore confidence, irrigators needed to hear that the Basin States are committed to taking the time to get the projects right. This has been entirely ignored.

“While the Ministerial Council agreed to create an Inspector General for the Basin, this ultimately undermines the Productivity Commission’s recommendation to split up the MDBA.

“It is not surprising that irrigators and governments have no confidence in the MDBA, as seen in the Council’s decision to set up an independent deliverability panel.

“The lack of real agreement about Basin Plan implementation and the incompetence of the MDBA continues to undermine the confidence of irrigation communities, drive away investment, and costs regional jobs. Enough is enough,” said Mr Anderson.

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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.