

Media Release



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Time for action at Water Ministerial Council

The Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) is calling for real action on four key issues when the Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council meets in Canberra this Sunday 4 August.

“To secure the health of Murray Darling Basin and the viability of irrigators along the river, the Ministerial Council needs to take action on water deliverability along the Murray River, the Productivity Commission’s Murray Darling Plan Five Year Assessment, the ACCC’s review of water markets, and setting the scientific record straight about the Lower Lakes,” said Mr Richard Anderson, Water Council Chair.

“At the December 2018 meeting, Ministers from the Basin States identified water deliverability below the Barmah Choke as a major challenge. Subsequently, the Murray Darling Basin Authority was asked to review water deliverability along the Murray River and identify potential solutions.

“Earlier this month, Victorian Minister for Water Lisa Neville listened to the calls of the VFF and announced she would reduce the risk of water delivery shortfalls by limiting new and the expansion of existing water licences.

“Minister Neville’s leadership will improve protections for Victoria’s irrigators and the health of the Murray River. But, we urgently need New South Wales (NSW) and South Australia (SA) to also limit the expansion of water licences so we can collectively reduce delivery risks for irrigators across New South Wales, Victorian and South Australia,” said Mr Anderson.

The Productivity Commission’s Murray Darling Plan Five Year Assessment was released in January 2019. The report called for greater transparency of environmental outcomes across the Basin, extending project timeframes to ensure they are not rushed, and improved compliance in the Northern Basin, as only 29% of surface water is currently metered.

“The Commonwealth Government has not taken any action on the Productivity Commissions’ 38 recommendations. The delay in responding to and implementing the recommendations is unacceptable,” said Mr Anderson.

“The Morrison Government made an election promise that they would direct the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) to review water markets in the Southern Basin. It has been over two months and the Terms of Reference for this review have still not been released.

“The VFF is calling on Minister for Water David Littleproud to provide an update on the ACCC review and release the Terms of Reference so the legitimate concerns of farmers can be addressed.

“The claim that the Lower Lakes in South Australia are naturally fresh bodies of water, an assumption that underpins much of the Basin Plan, has been called into question.

“We are very concerned that scientific research about the natural salinity of the Lower Lakes was found to have been altered, and that a recent scientific paper highlighting these changes was retracted by the CSIRO.

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“Farmers continue to have doubts over whether or not the Lower Lakes were ever fresh water. It is critical that the Ministerial Council commissions an independent scientific review to clarify the science and ensure politics has not interfered with the science.

“The Ministerial Council this Sunday is a critical meeting for the Basin Plan, for farmers and for regional communities. We must have action on these four key issues to secure the prosperous future of the Murray-Darling Basin,” 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.