

Media Release

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Risks to water delivery growing

The Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) calls on the Murray-Darling Ministerial Council to urgently undertake a review of water deliveries to ensure irrigators will not be restricted during critical peak summer demand.

The VFF believes the risk that water will not be delivered at critical times for different crops is growing, as expansion of horticulture downstream of the Barmah Choke is changing river demand patterns. This must be urgently addressed by State and Commonwealth Governments.

“There have been significant changes in river operations and demand for water in recent years. Irrigators, governments and the environmental water holders need to understand all of the risks associated with delivering water,” said Mr. Richard Anderson, VFF Water Council Chairman.

The failure to deliver water at critical times could cause catastrophic crop losses, particularly to established irrigators downstream of the Barmah Choke in Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia.

Over 1,000 gigalitres of water entitlements has permanently left the Goulburn Murray Irrigation District for downstream systems. Modelling by Goulburn Murray Water, Lower Murray Water, the Murray Darling Basin Authority and the Commonwealth Government has shown almond plantings will require an additional 1,500 gigalitres of water annually by 2027. As horticultural water demands increase, the likelihood of delivery shortfalls impacting all irrigators and the environment also increases.

“There is a limit to how much water can physically be delivered downstream, and that limit has reduced as erosion causes river banks to collapse.

“The capacity of the Murray at the Barmah Choke has decreased by 1,100 megalitres per day over the past 10 years due to severe erosion caused by running the river too high. The large volume of summer deliveries has also caused costly erosion in the Goulburn and Mitta Mitta rivers.

“It is time to take stock of risks to water delivery, including the potential for third party impacts from overbank flows,” said Mr Anderson.

The VFF is urging State and Commonwealth Water Ministers to discuss these issues at the Ministerial Council meeting this week and to direct the Murray Darling Basin Authority, working with State departments and agencies, to report in early 2019 on:

- The current and future risks of delivery shortfalls
- The frequency, duration and severity of projected shortfalls
- The consequences of shortfalls to irrigators and the environment
- Actions being taken to mitigate these shortfalls
- A program to properly inform water users of the risks of shortfall and potential third party impacts, and actions being taken to mitigate these risks

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About the VFF

The Victorian Farmers Federation is an active, powerful lobby group dedicated to the interests of farmers and making a difference to communities. With a strong record of successful political and industry advocacy and leadership, the VFF has generated substantial benefits for the agriculture sector since its formation in 1979.

The VFF consists of eight commodity groups; dairy (United Dairyfarmers of Victoria), livestock, grains, horticulture, chicken meat, eggs, pigs and Flowers Victoria – and expert committees representing; water, land management, agricultural and veterinarian chemicals, farm business and rural development and workplace relations.

VFF members lead each of these groups and committees with the support of Melbourne and regionally based staff. As a team we provide the power to effectively influence all levels of government on the wide range of issues that impact on modern farming. The VFF has approximately 200 branches across the state. Our vision is to create an environment for farmers that enables profitable, safe and sustainable production, within a community that values and respects the farm sector.