

Media Release

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Basis Plan Progress but more to do

Common sense has prevailed today at the Murray Darling Ministerial Council with all State and Commonwealth Water Ministers agreeing to socio-economic criteria that properly determines whether water recovery projects have a neutral or positive affect on regional communities.

“We’ve been fighting for six years for ‘fair dinkum’ tests that protect farmers and jobs. Today is a breakthrough in ensuring regional communities, jobs and farmers are protected against the third party impacts of water recovery,” said Mr Anderson, Chair Victorian Farmers Federation Water Council.

The Murray Darling Ministerial Council has agreed to new criteria that must apply to all projects for any recovery of the additional 450 gigalitres.

“We support projects that have a positive effect on regional communities and improve the environment, but finding projects that meet these criteria will be a big challenge.

Water recovery projects will now only be funded if they are made public, demonstrate that they contribute to the viability of irrigation districts, do not impact regional jobs, do not have negative third party impacts on irrigation systems, water markets or regional communities, do not increase the price of water, do not result in roting or profiteering and social and environmental impacts are improved.

“Irrigation communities are already hurting because of the large volumes of water that has already been taken out of production for the environment. These new criteria adopted by the Ministerial Council will ensure that any further water recovery will not cause more damage to our productive farms and communities.

The Ministerial Council also discussed concerns raised by the Victorian Farmers Federation this week about the increasing risks that the MDBA will not be able to deliver water to irrigators when it is urgently needed during heatwaves.

“We have seen significant changes in water deliveries as more crops have been developed downstream of the Barmah Choke and additional water is now going to South Australia – we need to ensure we can meet the demands of existing irrigators.

The Ministerial Councils decision to direct the MDBA to urgently investigate and report on the risks of delivery shortfalls this summer, and longer term risks is a terrific step in informing and protecting rural communities.

Good progress has been made by the Ministerial Council, but there is still much work to be done to implement the Basin Plan. Funding must now flow to agreed implementation programs and the serious issues raised by the productivity Commission and the South Australian Royal Commission will need to be addressed by governments in the new year.

“It is now vital that at the next Ministerial Council meeting implementation of the Productivity Commission’s recommendations is front and centre of the agenda,” said Mr Anderson.

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