

Ms Lizzie Blandthorn MP  
Chair, Public Accounts and Estimate Committee  
Parliament House, Spring Street  
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002



Dear Committee Chair,

**RE: Submission to Public Accounts and Estimates Committee's Inquiry into Auditor-General's report No. 202: Meeting Obligations to Protect Ramsar Wetlands (2016)**

The Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) thanks the Committee for this opportunity to provide comment on the Auditor-General's report that investigated the management of Victoria's Ramsar Wetlands in 2016.

The VFF is concerned the Auditor-General found there is limited evidence to demonstrate that Parks Victoria monitors and reports on the progress of management plan actions and that the management framework for most Ramsar sites lacks accountability, oversight and good governance.

There is great concern amongst communities, particularly in Northern Victoria, towards the use and management of environmental water within Ramsar sites. Agencies responsible for environmental watering do a poor job at explaining the benefits of environmental watering events. This creates confusion and frustration for the farming community which has surrendered much of its water under the Murray Darling Basin Plan to benefit the environment.

The VFF believes local communities have an important role to play in ensuring appropriate governance and accountability for how Ramsar sites are managed. Communities possess a great deal of knowledge about the ecological health and character of Ramsar sites which can be used to hold managers to account in the public sphere. However, this role is undermined where the community is denied sufficient knowledge and information about management decisions.

The VFF recommends that as part of the development of a state-wide approach to the management of Ramsar sites, all responsible agencies should be required to notify the community of environmental watering events before they occur, the purpose of those events and the outcomes.

Faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Jochinke". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

David Jochinke  
President

29 November 2019