

Media Release



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On-farm water recovery continues despite Minister's promises

The Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) is calling for the Commonwealth Minister for Water Resources to keep his word and stop on-farm water acquisition to meet the 450GL up-water target in addition to the Murray Darling Basin Plan.

VFF Water Council Chair Richard Anderson said he was disappointed the Commonwealth Department of Agriculture and Water is continuing to pursue on-farm water recovery despite the Federal Water Minister Keith Pitt's promise not to do so.

"Minister Pitt announced in September 2020 the Commonwealth was going to 'pivot' its water recovery efforts to off-farm, but his department continues to ignore the views of its own Minister."

"Farming communities expect the Minister and his department to follow through on the commitments he makes, not say one thing and do the opposite," Mr Anderson said

"We all understood in 2018 when the criteria was strengthened, it would rule out on-farm projects, but this continues to be ignored by the Department.

The Department recently released five South Australian on farm projects on its "Have Your Say" website that propose to recover a combined 126 megalitres (ML) for the environment. The proposed projects seek to upgrade drip irrigation, new pumps and install netting. These are in addition to six South Australian projects released in November last year.

"These projects will result in there being 126ML less water in the consumptive pool that is available for agriculture. The Minister might think a few projects will be okay and have no impact, but it's the cumulative impact the VFF is worried about, and the regional impacts of less water for agriculture," Mr Anderson said.

Since September 2019, 18 projects have been released for public comment for the 450GL water recovery, 17 have come from South Australia and one from Queensland.

"Victoria and New South Wales have accepted that on-farm projects are not a good water recovery option as they result in less water for farmers and drive up water prices. It's high time the South Australian Government acknowledge these problems too," Mr Anderson said.

Mr Anderson said the program lacked transparency with the department website only listing two of the 18 projects as approved and receiving funding. There are no details on the status of the remaining 16 projects.

"There is a total lack of transparency. We have proposals dating back to April last year that we do not know the outcome or status of. It is just a common courtesy to advise people who go to the trouble of making a submission of the outcome," Mr Anderson said.

"The VFF will prepare submissions, opposing each proposed project. The VFF has also written to the Commonwealth Water Minister seeking a commitment that he will uphold his promise not to pursue on-farm projects," Mr Anderson concluded.

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