

Media Release



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Pitt urged to avoid 12 more months of Basin Plan chaos

The Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) has written to Federal Water Minister Keith Pitt asking him to reconsider his decision to cancel the November meeting of Murray Darling Basin State Water Ministers.

VFF Water Council Chair Andrew Leahy said the failure to hold the meeting was a missed opportunity to reach an agreement on Basin Plan issues, before the forthcoming federal election, and elections in Victoria and South Australia.

“This meeting was the only real opportunity to agree to common sense outcomes for the Basin Plan in the next 12 months. Three elections will be held next year which means the chances of the Ministerial Council tackling the unresolved issues of the Basin Plan over the next 12 months are nil,” Mr Leahy said.

“This is as a huge missed opportunity. Politicians seem to think the easiest solution is just to kick the can down the road and not deal with any of the Basin Plan’s problems.”

“Farmers are sick of being treated as political footballs. We are the food producers of this Nation and we deserve some certainty around the Plan.”

Mr Leahy said the recent admission by New South Wales that the Menindee Lakes and Yanco Creek offset projects will be reworked, resulting in a significant shortfall of water should have been a key point of discussion for the Ministerial Council.

“Legally the Commonwealth is required to meet this shortfall. The VFF is concerned this would result in further water buybacks, particularly if a change of Government was to occur.”

“We know Federal Labor is hellbent on water buybacks, and the Commonwealth has provided no protection against this. Buybacks should be removed from Commonwealth legislation,” Mr Leahy said.

Mr Leahy also said he hoped a November meeting could have explored ways to create greater flexibility in 605 gigalitre (GL) offset projects and allow for new projects to be introduced as well as ruling out buybacks from all State Governments.

“The Commonwealth seems more focused on appeasing South Australia and only this week announced further grants to secure water towards the 450GL.”

“We know the 450GL cannot be delivered and all of the science is telling us this, but the Commonwealth is more interested in keeping up appearances with South Australia”.

“With the Basin Plan due for completion in 2024, farmers do not feel certain about their future with the threat of a Basin Plan 2.0 and further water recoveries. “

“The VFF is urging Minister Pitt to look past the politics, see common sense and agree that the Basin Plan cannot remain static. Change is needed now, not in the distant future,” Mr Leahy concluded.

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