

Media Release



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Central and Gippsland Water Strategy Must Change

The Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) says a plan for the future of water resources in Melbourne and Gippsland falls short of giving farmers the confidence they need to maintain the State's food security future.

VFF President Emma Germano said the draft Central and Gippsland Region Sustainable Water Strategy, a 50-year plan for the sharing of water across Melbourne, Geelong, Ballarat and Gippsland, fails to give certainty to farmers about water security issues.

"With a growing population in Melbourne comes a greater demand for food. The agricultural industry stands ready to expand and meet this demand. To do that, we need a strong plan that provides farmers and industry with confidence that their future is secure."

"Unfortunately, the VFF is concerned that elements of the draft strategy create uncertainty for farmers and the agriculture industry. At a time when agriculture is looking to expand, we are being told we have to do that with less water, but the environment, Traditional Owners and urban users need more. The Government needs to rethink this," Ms Germano said.

VFF Water Council Chair Andrew Leahy said he believed the draft strategy has the potential to undermine the Government's commitment to protect the entitlements of irrigators, which is contrary to positions put forward by Victorian Water Minister Lisa Neville.

"We recognise Minister Neville's clear and unequivocal position that the rights of existing entitlement holders will not be impacted in the implementation of the strategy. But the draft strategy makes reference to possible legislative change regarding entitlements to better suit Traditional Owners. Any proposed change to Victoria's water entitlement framework is a red flag for farmers."

"The VFF recognises Traditional Owners' aspirations to access water, but this must be achieved without impacting the existing water entitlements of farmers. It's not fair for farmers to be forced to subsidise the storage and use of this water. The obvious next step should be to use water that is currently available to the environment to meet the cultural needs of Aboriginal communities," Mr Leahy said.

"The strategy also makes the mistake that the Murray Darling Basin Plan has made by mandating environmental water targets, rather than focussing on broader environmental outcomes. Environmental water targets need to be adaptable to a changing climate, and the knowledge we gain along the way."

"The VFF is also concerned that there is little discussion on the Latrobe Valley mine closures as it is estimated they will require 1,600-3,000 GL if the pit lakes are implemented in full," Mr Leahy said.

In response to the draft strategy, Ms Germano and Mr Leahy have written to Minister Neville and have offered to assist the Government to make the strategy work better for farmers.

“The VFF is keen to work with the Government as it considers the community’s feedback and it develops the final strategy to help ensure agriculture has a future throughout the region,” Ms Germano concluded.

The VFF’s submission to the Central and Gippsland Region can be accessed and viewed at <http://www.vff.org.au/water>

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