

Media Release



Victorian
Farmers
Federation

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Damning analysis shows governments must avoid Basin Plan

The Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) has urged State and Federal water ministers to avoid causing further pain to Northern Victorian farming communities when they meet next week to discuss the Murray Darling Basin Plan.

VFF Water Council Chair Andrew Leahy said analysis released by the Victorian Government this week showed reduced water use in the Goulburn Murray Irrigation District (GMID) had already cost the community millions of dollars in lost economic production and jobs.

“The evidence is in. The Basin Plan has clearly cost farmers, our rural communities and food production. If there was no Basin Plan the analysis clearly shows that water use in the GMID could be 50 per cent higher.”

“Since 2005, there has been a 500GL reduction in irrigation across the GMID. Buybacks and on-farm water recovery projects have pushed water prices up by \$72 per megalitre and a greater number of irrigators are now dependent on the temporary market.”

Mr Leahy warned that any proposed recovery of the 450GL up-water target would decimate irrigated agriculture in Northern Victoria, which has been disproportionately targeted for water buybacks.

“The analysis shows that if the 450GL was recovered through buybacks, more than 50,000 hectares would be lost to irrigation with over 12,000 hectares of horticulture having to be dried off. This would result in a \$500 million loss in irrigated production.”

“Over 41% of environmental water is held as Victorian High Reliability Water Shares. That means in a drought, Victoria is doing all the heavy lifting in providing for the environment, whilst also having to get water to farmers.”

“It is incomprehensible that the Commonwealth continues to support a Basin Plan that has such an unfair distribution of cost impacts. It is even more unbelievable the Commonwealth is proposing to recover an additional 450 GL of water,” Mr Leahy said.

With 2,100GL of the 2,750GL target already recovered under the Basin Plan, Mr Leahy called for greater flexibility in the implementation of projects under the Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment Mechanism (SDLAM).

“The report identifies a 160 – 370GL shortfall in the SDLAM projects that are required to be completed by 2024. We need the ability and flexibility to make alterations needed to ensure we get these projects right.”

Mr Leahy said the VFF was meeting urgently with the Victorian Water Minister Harriet Shing before the Ministerial Council to outline the concerns of the farming community.

“We will be asking that the Victorian Government remains opposed to water buybacks and on-farm projects that reduce the consumptive pool and ensure no changes are made to the social and economic test.”

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“If the Commonwealth Government gives a damn about regional jobs, then protecting irrigated agriculture and food security must be the priority at Ministerial Council next week,” Mr Leahy concluded.

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