

Media Release



Victorian
Farmers
Federation

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Murray Darling Basin Authority is out of touch

The Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) has expressed outrage towards the comments made by Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) Chief Executive Andrew McConville in his Rural Press Club address, 10 years after the Basin Plan gave the green light to take water from farming communities.

VFF Water Council Chair Andrew Leahy said Mr McConville's commentary ignored the ongoing impact of the Murray Darling Basin Plan on farming communities and sounded like it was designed to appease the Federal Labor government.

"This speech reads as if there has been no opposition to the Basin Plan and that farming communities won't be impacted by extreme water recovery targets. Did the MDBA CEO not read about the mass protests in Canberra in recent years?"

"We expect the MDBA CEO to be professional and impartial, not a political sycophant. It seems he needs to re-read the Basin Plan as he forgot to mention in his speech that the 450GL is only possible if there are no negative social and economic impacts".

Mr Leahy said Mr McConville's commentary also ignored the facts surrounding the Basin Plan and the 450 GL up-water target.

"Saying that all governments signed up to a 3,200 gigalitre (GL) Basin Plan, that includes the 450 GL, is a complete mistruth."

"The Victorian Government has never supported a 3,200GL plan."

In 2012 Victorian Water Minister Peter Walsh stated that he was 'bitterly disappointed the Commonwealth Government is not pursuing the 2,750GL Plan, with offsets, that was agreed to by Basin State Ministers and the Commonwealth in July this year".

From opposition in 2016 he further clarified that the "450GL deal secretly devised by former Labor Water Minister Tony Burke and South Australia's Labor Government was not developed through the Basin Ministerial Council."

"We have a socio-economic test that all states agreed to in 2018. It's high time the MDBA and Commonwealth apply this test rather than sidelining the formal decisions of the Ministerial Council."

Mr Leahy said the commentary and actions around buybacks placed a huge dent in the confidence and investment certainty farmers need, especially at a time when they are facing great challenges.

"The Federal Labor Government exploited farmers vulnerabilities in the crippling Millennium Drought with water buybacks and now they seem set to do so again during devastating floods."

"Flood affected farmers will face extreme hardships due to destroyed crops and loss of income, and this renewed buyback call can only hurt agricultural production."

“Despite all the talk, no real change has been made to the Basin Plan, the problems the VFF identified 10 years ago with the 450GL and water buybacks remain just as strong today”.

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