

Media Release



Victorian
Farmers
Federation

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People and industry must be at centre of Basin Plan

The Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) says people and industry must be at the centre of discussions during next week's meeting of state and federal water ministers on the Murray-Darling Basin Plan.

VFF President Emma Germano said the Murray-Darling Basin Authority's (MDBA) recently released report card on the Basin Plan highlighted the fact that Canberra is ignoring the impacts on regional communities and irrigated agriculture with its plans to buyback an additional 450GL on top of the Basin Plan.

"Farmers in the Basin produce food for the nation. They are now doing that with one third less of the water they had before. Taking more water from them will not only make their own lives more difficult, but it will also drive-up food prices - impacting households at a time when they are most sensitive to price increases."

"The MDBA's report card doesn't look at the impact on jobs, on food production and on communities that have resulted from water buybacks and broader Basin Plan implementation."

Ms Germano called on the federal Labor government to refocus its aims back towards the Basin Plan's original goal of achieving positive social, economic, and environmental outcomes.

"Minister Plibersek needs to listen more to all her state counterparts, not just the South Australian minister. They understand the original objectives behind the Basin Plan to optimize social and economic outcomes and to improve water security for all users. The social and economic outcomes seem to be the objectives that are constantly forgotten about or ignored."

Ms Germano said the concept of fully implementing the Basin Plan had become a political football and that federal and state water ministers needing to agree on what a fully implemented Plan is.

"The most alarming comment in the MDBA's report card was that 'most regions support full implementation of the Basin Plan'. This is simply untrue. There is widespread opposition to more Commonwealth water purchases and widespread opposition to reducing the amount of water available for producing food."

Unfortunately, 'full implementation' is a phrase that has been peddled out by all sides of politics. Under the Coalition, full implementation meant, the legislated 2750GL Basin Plan, but under federal Labor they seem intent on rewriting the plan and merging the 450GL with the 2750GL to make it a 3200GL plan.

"We know what buybacks will do to irrigated agriculture in Northern Victoria, because we have seen the impacts before. Reduced food production, job losses and weaker communities."

"Farmers cannot be squeezed out of any more water, without risking jobs and reducing food production in one of Australia's most important agricultural regions," Ms Germano said.

Comments attributable to VFF Water Council Chair Andrew Leahy:

“We are staring down the barrel of more Commonwealth buybacks which fuels uncertainty for farmers. We must remember the 450GL was never guaranteed and is subject to a socio-economic test and that water buybacks fail to meet this test.”

Comments attributable to VFF/UDV President Mark Billing

“Talk of water buybacks and attempts to secure the 450GL up-water target by the Commonwealth simply infuriates dairy farmers. They just want to get on with the job of milking their cows and feeding the nation. With Northern Victorian milk filling gaps on supermarket shelves in Sydney and Brisbane, making sure that farmers have the water available to produce quality milk is truly in the national interest.”

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Media Contacts:

Ryan Moloney, VFF, 0400 874 589