

Media Release



Victorian
Farmers
Federation

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Basin Plan socio-economic test vanishes

The Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) has written to Commonwealth Water Minister Tanya Plibersek this week following a key document setting out the socio-economic criteria under the Murray-Darling Basin Plan being removed from the government's website.

VFF Water Council Chair Andrew Leahy said farmers should be concerned by the Commonwealth's moves to walk back from the socio-economic test for recovery of the 450GL up-water target.

"This is a key document that was developed by all basin governments and agreed to unanimously in 2018. The VFF is concerned that the Commonwealth are trying to remove key documents that we know they don't like."

"The socio-economic test was developed by Ministerial Council in 2018 and agreed unanimously by all Basin States and Commonwealth Government at the time. It has sat alongside Ministerial Council Communique documents on government websites for anyone to be able to download the four pages of criteria."

"This criteria is our greatest protection against 450GL being purchased off farmers, and now it has disappeared", said Mr Leahy.

"The criteria applies to water that is recovered for the 450GL upwater as part of the Basin Plan. Contrary to what the Commonwealth Government is currently suggesting, the 450GL was never guaranteed and could only be recovered if there were no negative impacts on regional and rural communities."

The criteria states that any projects for the 450GL 'must ensure there is no direct impact on the reliability of water' and that 'projects must not directly increase the price of water'.

"We know that water buybacks reduce the pool of water available for food production. Even the Australian Bureau of Agricultural Resource Economics and Sciences in 2020 concluded that water buybacks will increase the price of water by \$63 per megalitre."

"The Commonwealth is actively purchasing water and Minister Plibersek has signalled that she wants to get the 450GL. Last week the Commonwealth ran online consultations on how they could get more water for the Basin Plan including the 450GL. The VFF sat in on these webinars and the socio-economic test was not mentioned."

"The VFF will await a response from the Minister and we hope to see the socio-economic test criteria return to the government's website," Mr Leahy concluded.

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