

Media Release



Victorian
Farmers
Federation

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Basin Plan buybacks a death knell for the bush

The Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) says the Productivity Commission's Murray-Darling Basin Plan Implementation Review backing of more water buybacks would irreversibly damage Basin farming communities and tears up a decade-long agreement to collaboratively manage the river system.

VFF Water Council Chair Andrew Leahy said the 262-page report acknowledges the Basin Plan agreed 12 years ago set out that any water towards the 450GL was subject to not having negative impacts on communities vindicating the VFF's position.

"Federal Water Minister Tanya Plibersek's legislation before the Parliament, tears up the collaborative management of the Murray-Darling Basin to buyback water for the 450GL no matter the consequences."

"The interim report assumes ongoing collaboration between the States, but that's no longer true. Victoria has not signed to the Commonwealth's buyback proposal and the New South Wales Government has also said it doesn't support buybacks".

"The 450GL was never guaranteed and was to be subject to a socio-economic test, it's good to see the Productivity Commission pointing this out".

"Buybacks kill rural communities, it's plain and simple, I've seen it first-hand in my hometown."

"We'll have less kids in our schools, less doctors and nurses and less community volunteers in the CFA and our local football teams," Mr Leahy said.

The Productivity Commission have pointed out the need for structural adjustment programs to assist communities impacted by water buy backs, but the legislation ignores structural adjustment obligations.

The VFF supports the Productivity Commission's call for the Commonwealth to focus on recovering the water towards the original 2750GL of the Basin Plan before targeting the 450GL.

The Productivity Commission stated in its report five years ago that water recovered for the environment could not be delivered due to constraints. In this interim report they state that, 'Improving environmental outcomes in the Southern Basin requires progress on easing constraints and adjusting operational rules to better deliver environmental outcomes, not just recovering water.'

"It makes no sense to want to tick a box on a page and recover water, when we all know it can't be delivered. We need to be focussed on environmental outcomes, some of which do not require water.

"The Commonwealth needs to rethink its obsession with water buybacks and needs to start thinking about real environmental outcomes."

“The report only spends three pages on the Northern Basin, and yet we know this is where all the environmental problems are with fish kills and algal blooms. It is about time that Minister Plibersek worried about real practical environmental problems of the Darling River, not her political problems with South Australia.”

“The legislation as it stands does not identify any environmental outcomes for the Northern Basin and this must change,” Mr Leahy said.

The VFF will be preparing another submission on this interim report in the hope of getting a better outcome in the final report.

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