
MURRAY RIVER GROUP OF COUNCILS CALLS ON AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT TO SLOW DOWN WATER AMENDMENT BILL PROCESS AND CONSULT WITH COMMUNITIES

Murray River Group of Councils (MRGC) Acting Chair Cr Tony Marwood is urging the Australian Government to slow down the Senate process on the *Water Amendment (Restoring Our Rivers) Bill 2023* and consult with communities across the region.

"We don't understand why the bill is being rushed through the Senate, especially when it is clear that concern about the potential reintroduction of water buybacks is widespread, both geographically and among industries," Cr Marwood said.

"In presenting our concerns to the Senate Committee Inquiry in Canberra on 31 October, our sentiments were echoed by our NSW and Queensland local government counterparts, as well as by agricultural industry and farmer representatives.

"It's interesting to note that even the Senate Committee's own report admits that the committee accepts that buybacks will have an impact on communities.

"Furthermore, just last week, Murray Darling Basin Authority Chair Sir Angus Houston told us that his team had heard '*lots of concern about water buybacks*' from communities as part of their current visitation program across the Basin.

"If local councils were faced with this level of community dissent on an issue, they would be obliged to consult widely and directly with the people who would be impacted by the decision. We want the Australian Government to afford our citizens the same opportunity to be heard and validated."

The MRGC wants all parliamentarians to hear the voices of its regional communities, such as those of these agricultural business owners and industry leaders:

Almonds Australia Chief Executive Officer Tim Jackson says, "*Water buybacks will have a devastating effect on Murray Darling Basin communities. It'll create*



uncertainty and the viability of a lot of industries that have fed the nation and beyond will be under siege."

Australian Table Grapes Association Industry Development Manager Jenny Treeby says, *"More water buybacks would mean that the price per mega-litre of water will go up. The cost of labour has already gone up, more than in the past. So, if water goes up and if labour goes up – the two key inputs – the prices at the checkout will have to reflect the increased price of production."*

Dairy farmers Andrew Tyler of Tongala and Ann Gardiner of Bamawm say, *"water buybacks will decimate the dairy industry"*.

Third-generation fruit farmer Adrian Conti of Conti's Orchards says, *'If water was to be removed from this area, it would make us unviable"*.

"These are the voices of our community," Cr Marwood said.

"These are 'real people' whose livelihoods, and that of their families and workers, will be impacted by buybacks.

"More than that, the flow-on impacts of buybacks would affect supply chain businesses and reliant sectors, such as food manufacturing and tourism, and, ultimately, community clubs, organisations and facilities.

"We implore the government to slow down the Senate process. We also extend an invitation to all Australian senators to come and visit our region to talk to the people so they can fully understand their concerns, and learn from their insights and experiences."

For more information and to sign the petition, visit

<http://www.mrgc.com.au/pushbackbuybacks/>.

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Media enquiries: Campaspe Shire Council Communications Team via email comms@campaspe.vic.gov.au or phone (03) 5483 6985.

About the Murray River Group of Councils

The Murray River Group of Councils (MRGC) comprises of six councils in northern Victoria, Mildura and Swan Hill Rural City Councils and Loddon, Gannawarra, Campaspe and Moira Shire Councils.



LGA	POPULATION 2021	LGA	AREA
Mildura	56,972	Mildura	22,083 Km2
Campaspe	38,735	Loddon	6,696 Km2
Moira	30,522	Swan Hill	6,115 Km2
Swan Hill	21,403	Campaspe	4,519 Km2
Gannawarra	10,638	Moira	4,047 Km2
Loddon	7,759	Gannawarra	3,735 Km2

Water is the lifeblood of our communities.

Agricultural commodities in the MRGC region have combined a value in excess of \$4 billion. Together, the agriculture and food manufacturing sectors account for, a third of all economic output, 43% of all local expenditure and one in four jobs in our region. Around half of all farm businesses in our region rely on irrigation.

The rivers, floodplains, lakes and wetlands of northern Victoria have enormous environmental value and are fundamental to our regional identity. Our region is home to four Ramsar wetlands: Hattah-Kulkyne, Kerang Wetlands, Gunbower and Barmah.

Our communities depend on a healthy Murray River system for drinking water and for recreation. Our tourism industry relies in large part on a healthy Murray River system as the single main attraction for the region.

All these depend on the careful management of the Murray Darling Basin water resources in partnership with Basin communities.



Mildura Rural City Council



SWAN HILL
Rural City Council



GANNAWARRA
Shire Council



LODDON
SHIRE



Campaspe
Shire Council



moira
SHIRE