

## MURRAY RIVER GROUP OF COUNCILS CHAIR DISAPPOINTED WITH SENATE COMMITTEE REPORT ON WATER AMENDMENT BILL

"Disappointing, concerning and unbalanced" is how Murray River Group of Councils Chair Cr Rob Amos described The Senate Environment and Communications Legislation Committee's report on the *Water Amendment (Restoring Our Rivers) Bill 2023* in relation to the issue of water buybacks.

"It's disappointing that the Senate Committee is recommending that the Bill is passed into legislation despite the significant negative socio-economic impacts water buybacks will have on our northern Victorian industries, economies and communities," Cr Amos said.

Cr Amos said he was particularly concerned by the comment in the report that *'the committee accepts that buybacks have an impact on communities but views some of the concerns regarding buybacks as overinflated and not supported by the high-quality evidence base'*.

"This statement is not only dismissive of the independent research that show water buybacks have caused significant negative socio-economic impacts, but it also lacks understanding of the concerns of our farmers, workers and industry leaders who have firsthand experience of these consequences.

"The committee's reasoning for using buybacks because they have *'proven to be the most reliable and cost-effective and efficient form of water recovery'* is also concerning.

"While buybacks may have short-term efficiencies and less upfront costs, what about the long-term costs of water buybacks on decimated businesses, industries and communities? Or, the long-term costs to Australian families as the reduced availability of fresh dairy and produce pushes prices up at the checkout?

"This reasoning is also unbalanced because it doesn't take into account the triple bottom line of social, economic and environmental impacts.



“It will be too hard to put the genie back in the bottle when the inevitable starts to happen if buybacks are reintroduced – once farms and associated businesses start to close, once workers start losing their jobs and once participation levels in community programs and local sports clubs start to drop – it will be too late.

“These are the ‘hidden impacts’ of water buybacks and go to the heart of the social cohesion and connectedness of our communities, and the health and wellbeing of our residents.”

In speaking to the Senate on 9 November about his recent visit to the MRGC region, Senator David Van said:

*“The simplistic just add water approach of Restoring the Rivers Amendment is not the answer. We need to be walking hand in hand with the people who farm our land and waterways. We need to listen to their solutions. Not rely on city-based modelling to determine the future of our food crops and farming communities.”*

“I urge all Australian parliamentarians to take heed of this advice,” Cr Amos said.

“Please don’t put the food bowl of our nation or our economic and social future at risk, again. Vote against the Water Amendment (Restoring Our Rivers) Bill 2023, for the benefit of all Australians.”

For more information and to sign the petition, visit  
<http://www.mrgc.com.au/pushbackbuybacks/>.

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## 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