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Media Release

MURRAY RIVER GROUP OF COUNCILS CHAIR SAYS PROPOSED CHANGES IN WATER AMENDMENT BILL ARE 'UNAUSTRALIAN'

"The reintroduction of water buybacks would cause significant negative socio-economic impacts on industries, economies and communities" was the key message Murray River Group of Councils Chair Cr Rob Amos delivered at a 31 October public hearing for the Inquiry into the Water Amendment (Restoring Our Rivers) Bill 2023.

Cr Amos said that proposed changes under the Bill were inconsistent with the Water Act 2007 and the 2012 Murray Darling Basin Plan to which the Commonwealth and all Basin states agreed.

"A key objective of the Water Act is *'to promote the use and management of the Basin water resources in a way that optimises economic, social and environmental outcomes'*. However, the new Water Amendment Bill seeks to remove the socio-economic impact test from the Basin Plan implementation," Cr Amos said.

"Independent research and our previous experience show that water buybacks cause massive job losses, business closure and a breakdown of the social fabric of communities.

"So, to remove the socio-economic impact test from the Basin Plan is like sticking your head in the sand and ignoring what the data and community is telling you about what happens in reality."

Cr Amos also said the Bill was 'unAustralian' because it is in opposition to what the Australian Government is supposed to stand for.

"In his 2022 federal election victory speech, incoming Prime Minister Anthony Albanese declared two key principles upon which his government would be led – 'no-one left behind' and 'no-one held back'.

"Now, in 2023, we find ourselves with a Bill that undermines the Prime Minister's promise to the Australian people. There is no doubt that hard-working Australians and their families will lose out if this Bill becomes legislation.

"That's why the Murray River Group of Councils is urging all Australian parliamentarians to look beyond water recovery targets only and apply a triple-bottom-line (social, economic and environmental impacts) lens when considering how they vote on the upcoming Bill.



“To do otherwise, would be contrary to Prime Minister Albanese’s 2022 promise to the Australian people and out of step with the Aussie spirit of ‘a fair go for all’.

Cr Amos said it was unfortunate that the public hearings were not held in towns where local communities could have voiced their concerns and given their own evidence to the Senate Committee in person.

“It’s our understanding this Bill is expected to be passed into legislation before the end of the year. However, many people and organisations giving evidence at the public hearing wanted to know why the government is in such a hurry and why the hearings are being held in Canberra and not in towns where the Senate Committee would have the opportunity to hear the lived experiences of water buybacks from people whose businesses, workers, families and communities have been impacted in the past.

“In keeping with his promise to the Australian people, we urge the Prime Minister to intervene to ensure that the government gets the social, economic and environmental balance right with the Basin Plan legislation; not only to avoid a repeat of the dire consequences of the past but to ensure we can continue to thrive into the future.”

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