

# Letter to the Editor

Thurs, 5 October 2023

Dear Prime Minister

We, the Murray River Group of Councils, from northern Victoria, implore you not to allow proposed changes to the Murray Darling Basin Plan legislation that would enable the reintroduction of water buybacks from primary producer irrigators. You will seal the fate of our vulnerable agricultural industries and further decimate our fragile regional communities still recovering from the pandemic, fires and floods.

### Water is the lifeblood of our communities.

Our region is one of the nation's largest food bowls. Agricultural production, food processing and associated businesses drive our northern Victorian economies. Together, the agriculture and food processing sectors in our region account for:

- One third of all economic output,
- 43% of all local expenditure; and
- One in four jobs in our region.

### Please don't risk our economic future.

Extensive government and independent socio-economic analyses clearly demonstrate that water buybacks have had a negative impact across our communities, such as:

- \$500 million of lost productivity across the Goulburn Murray Irrigation District (GMID) each year
- undermining the viability of irrigation districts, with 50% less water used in the GMID in recent years
- irrigation job losses of over 40% in northern Victoria
- directly increased water market prices, ABARES estimates on average by \$72/ML.

### Please don't further increase cost of living pressures.

The lack of access to, and increased cost of, water, directly impacts the availability of Australian-grown produce. This, in turn, flows on to consumers through increased cost of fresh produce and food products at the checkout. It's vitally important we protect our food-growing areas and the right of all Australians to have access to affordable fresh Australian-grown produce.

### Please consider the alternatives to water buybacks.

The environmental waterflows proposed under changes to the Basin Plan predict some areas would be in a permanent flood condition. Instead, we urge the government to continue investing in water-saving and efficiency projects, such as those operating successfully at Hattah Lakes and Gunbower Forest.



Please let us work together.

It is now time to put all politics aside and all levels of government work together towards achieving the environmental outcomes to which we all aspire, while also applying a human lens in understanding the broader ramifications of water buybacks on our businesses, industries, families and communities.

We urge you as Prime Minister, and all Australian Parliamentarians, not to put our economic and social future at risk by voting against the Water Amendment (Restoring Our Rivers) Bill 2023, for the benefit of all Australians.

**Cr Rob Amos**

Chair, Murray River Group of Councils



Mildura Rural City Council

