

Media Release

The Hon Lisa Neville MP

Minister for the Coordination of Environment, Land, Water, and Planning – COVID-19
Minister for Police and Emergency Services
Minister for Water



Friday, 8 May 2020

STANDING UP FOR VICTORIAN BASIN COMMUNITIES

The Andrews Labor Government continues to stand up for Victorian irrigation communities, to ensure they are not unfairly impacted by proposed projects to recover more water towards the Basin Plan's extra 450 gigalitres of water.

Minister for Water Lisa Neville has written to Federal Water Minister Keith Pitt demanding an explanation as to why other jurisdictions continue to be able to submit projects to the Commonwealth's Water Efficiency Program that do not meet the strict socio-economic criteria agreed to by all Basin states and the Commonwealth.

Victoria has led the way in getting agreement from Basin Governments on strict socio-economic criteria, which includes a high level of transparency with proposed projects - to ensure that any further water recovery must have a positive outcome for irrigation communities across the southern connected Basin.

Victoria's concern is that projects being proposed are not water saving projects – in reality they are payments for on-farm works that don't save water – meaning any recovery of water is coming straight from the consumptive pool, putting upward pressure on prices for irrigators across the Basin.

The criteria agreed to by all Basin Ministers in 2018 includes requirements that projects protect jobs, support regional communities and economies, guard against increases in water prices and don't have third party or region-wide negative impacts.

However, most of the projects submitted under the Water Efficiency Program so far lack transparency and the information provided is insufficient to enable the public to comment on the projects' compliance with the socio-economic criteria.

If proposals like these are approved, there will be less water available in the consumptive pool for irrigators and a direct increase in market price. This is unacceptable.

Minister Neville is also seeking an explanation as to why jurisdictions have not been appropriately notified and communities adequately consulted when projects are submitted to the Water Efficiency Program.

Victoria is on track to deliver its targets under the Basin Plan without further buy backs – any Victorian projects will recover water through investment in savings, not recovery from the consumptive pool.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Water Lisa Neville

"Our position on the 450 gigalitres of water remains consistent - water can only be recovered if there is neutral or positive socio-economic impacts."

"The on-farm proposals in the Efficiency Measures Program do not meet the socio-economic criteria that Ministers agreed to - even the most basic requirements are not being met."

"We will continue to back our irrigation communities and do whatever is necessary to prevent further loss of productive water from our system and protect farmers facing already high prices."

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