

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, 19 June 2020

VICTORIA SECURES PROTECTIONS FOR BASIN COMMUNITIES

The Victorian Government today secured further agreements on delivery of the Basin Plan to protect communities – including a renewed commitment from the Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council to the socio-economic criteria for water efficiency projects first agreed in 2018.

Victorian Minister for Water Lisa Neville said Ministers agreed to a Victorian motion re-affirming every project will be assessed against the criteria and assessments be reported back to Ministerial Council and the community.

To proceed, every project needs to have positive outcomes for communities and be transparently presented to allow community feedback.

Victoria and New South Wales put forward a motion to extend the 2024 timeline for offset projects based on a recommendation from the Productivity Commission, and to avoid the possibility of water buybacks.

While the motion was opposed by other jurisdictions, it has become clear that some projects can't be delivered unless the timelines are adjusted and good projects should not unnecessarily be taken off the table.

Victoria also raised concerns about deliverability in the system and secured agreement from New South Wales and South Australia to assess any proposals for more water extraction from the Lower Murray.

A set of principles to use in assessing any further extraction will be developed and reported back to Minco. The Minco deliverability panel noted significant growth in horticulture in the Lower Murray is leading to increased demand.

The MDBA has agreed to adopt a regime to limit high flows over summer which cause damage to the Murray and Goulburn rivers.

The Ministerial Council agreed to establish modelling to better understand the impact of climate change on constraints and noted that current information on constraints measures was inadequate to ensure community confidence.

Victoria also raised the need to do a climate change assessment in relation to the Lower Lakes and the CSIRO finding that it would be increasingly difficult to maintain them as a freshwater system.

Minister Neville secured agreement that New South Wales and Queensland would engage Victoria in their reviews and reports on floodplain harvesting and first flush events. Floodplain harvesting in the north can contribute to a lack of inflows in the southern Basin.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Water Lisa Neville

"We have consistently stood up for Victorian communities as the Plan is rolled out – the socio-economic criteria are a non-negotiable for our Basin communities"

"It's timely to reconsider the timeframes for delivering the offset projects – and it's inappropriate for the MDBA to threaten buy backs if unrealistic timeframes aren't met – I won't stand by and let that happen."

"I'm pleased New South Wales and South Australia are sending a signal that further extraction in the Lower Murray does pose risks for deliverability for irrigators and the environment."

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