

# 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, 4 September 2020

## VICTORIA WELCOMES MDBA SPLIT AND END TO BUYBACKS

The Commonwealth has adopted key Victorian positions on the Murray Darling Basin Plan, announcing there'll be no buybacks as part of future water recovery and that the Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) will be split.

Minister for Water Lisa Neville today welcomed the Commonwealth's announcement, saying it was pleasing they had listened to Victoria's position.

Minister Neville said Federal Water Minister Keith Pitt had also assured her that on farm efficiency projects would not be part of future water recovery.

The Victorian Government has a long standing and consistent position against buybacks and has worked hard to meet its Basin Plan obligations without taking more water from farmers.

While no further buybacks is welcome, Victoria remains strongly committed to the socio-economic criteria agreed by Basin governments that guarantee projects with negative impacts for communities won't proceed.

Victoria has met – or identified projects to meet – its legal obligations for water recovery under the Plan, with 800 gigalitres achieved and projects to reach its obligation of 1075 gigalitres under way. Any further recovery projects need to meet the strict socio-economic criteria.

Victoria has also supported the Productivity Commission's recommendations, handed down in 2019, to split the MDBA's policy and enforcement functions to ensure no real or perceived conflict of interest.

Victoria has led the way on compliance and enforcement, recently completing an independent compliance audit and introducing legislation to support a zero-tolerance approach to water theft – including tougher penalties and on the spot fines.

In terms of the MDBA's policy work there is much to be done – the Commonwealth, the MDBA and Basin states need to improve rules around floodplain harvesting and first flush events.

In line with the Productivity Commission report, the 2024 timeline for the delivery of environmental offset projects should be pushed back so that good projects can be delivered.

There is still significant work to do on deliverability to ensure proper operating rules and flow regimes are in place, so large amounts of water already recovered for the environment.

Improved deliverability rules will also ensure water being delivered to irrigators can be moved through the system without causing environmental damage to rivers including the Murray and the Goulburn.

### Quotes attributable to Minister for Water Lisa Neville

*"I've long argued against buybacks. We know communities in Northern Victoria have suffered very serious socio-economic impacts from water buybacks – loss of productive water from farms, loss of jobs, loss of economic activity and associated social impacts."*

*"The socio-economic test will still apply for infrastructure projects to recover water – my position has always been that infrastructure projects that reduce system losses are the best way to recover water for the environment."*

*"I welcome a greater emphasis on enforcement and compliance – our farmers have done the heavy lifting – and hard-earned water for the environment needs to be properly accounted for and protected."*

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