

# Media Release

**The Hon Lisa Neville MP**

Minister for Police and Emergency Services

Minister for Water



Monday, 16 November 2020

## VICTORIA CALLS ON COMMONWEALTH TO STAND UP FOR IRRIGATORS

The Victorian Government is sticking to its promise to stand up for Victorian irrigation communities after more on-farm projects were put up for consultation on the Commonwealth website late last week.

Minister for Water Lisa Neville has written to Federal Minister for Water Keith Pitt to urge him to reject any further proposals for on-farm projects – as they do not meet the agreed socio-economic criteria agreed to by all Basin state Ministers in 2018 and reaffirmed at the most recent Murray Darling Basin Ministerial Council in June.

Minister Neville said consideration of further on-farm projects completely eroded the trust of irrigators and Basin communities that any future projects must have only positive or neutral impact on their communities.

South Australia has put forward these on-farm projects totalling 288 megalitres to recover water when they clearly do not meet the socio-economic criteria and would remove water from the consumptive pool.

While the ultimate responsibility for the approval and funding of these projects is with the Commonwealth, Minister Neville is questioning why the six projects are still being considered – despite assurances to the contrary.

Victoria's concerns regarding the impact of water recovery from on-farm projects are real and based on solid evidence. The recent Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics' report "Economic effects of water recovery in the Murray–Darling Basin" highlighted that on-farm projects have double the water market impact of buybacks.

Victoria has done our share, recovering 826 GL for the environment – and we are working hard on further projects that can recover water through investment in savings, not from the consumptive pool.

Our sights are now set on the \$177.5 million GMW Water Efficiency Project, which is ready to start delivering as soon as contracts with the Commonwealth are agreed and signed.

This project will modernise inefficient supply infrastructure, stimulate regional economies and reduce costs for irrigators in the long term – delivering 15.9 GL of water for the environment while still complying with the socio-economic criteria.

The Commonwealth has recognised that off-farm water recovery is better for communities and has publicly stated they will be moving away from these projects which negatively impact Basin irrigators.

Victoria is calling on the Commonwealth to stand by their word and reject the current on-farm proposals from South Australia – as well as any future submissions which would take water from the consumptive pool.

### Quotes attributable to Minister for Water Lisa Neville

*"The evidence is clear that on-farm projects which take water entitlements from irrigators are even worse than buybacks for our communities – who have already suffered enough."*

*"Our submission of the Goulburn Murray Water efficiency project has shown that we can meet our obligations under the Basin Plan and benefit the environment – without buybacks or taking consumptive water from farmers."*

*"I have written to Minister Pitt to seek assurances that these six on-farm projects, and future projects like these, will not be going ahead at the expense of irrigators in Basin communities."*

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