

**April 18, 2020**

## **Joint Statement**

The Keelty Review can best be described as a waste of taxpayers' money that must be embarrassing for our Federal Government.

Concern was recently expressed that Murray-Darling Basin Interim Inspector-General Mick Keelty did not have the background or experience to address complex water policy issues, and unfortunately the review has done nothing to appease this fear.

The five recommendations provide very little in the way of solutions and the review appears to be another delaying tactic by the Federal Government. The only conclusion we can draw is that the government is hoping for substantial winter rains so there is water in abundance this spring and the problems will go away. But we need to get the fundamentals of flawed water policy fixed, and this wasted review will not achieve that.

Perhaps the only shining light in the report is the recommendation that the MDBA needs to review system inflows due to a drying climate. Our farming and community groups have been saying this for a decade. As a result the environment is over allocated and has no chance of evolving to thrive in a drying climate.

Apart from that, this is a wasted opportunity. Food and fibre producers in the Southern Basin put their trust in Mr Keelty, but again it was misguided. It appears the MDBA has had significant input into the review, yet the MDBA is a large part of the problem.

Mr Keelty was presented with various solutions, which his report failed to identify including:

- Food producers in southern NSW and northern Victoria should not be responsible for the delivery of extra water downstream, whether for

productive or environmental purposes. Conveyance losses are the major factor preventing an allocation to General Security and extra allocation to Victorian GMID allocation entitlement holders in the past two years.

- NSW and Victoria should not have to deliver the shortfall of water to the South Australian border when the Darling is offline

Mr Keelty has missed an opportunity to acknowledge problems with the Basin Plan. To fix the mess we need to:

1. Stop trying to push so much water down the system that you unintentionally flood forests.
2. Stop pouring water out to sea.
3. Start using our water more effectively and efficiently.
4. Implement the user pays system for water trading in the Southern Connected System, which was agreed to in 2004 with the National Water Initiative and embedded in the Water Act – this must include environmental and productive water.

Mr Keelty's report indicates he saw a lack of trust in the MDBA, which is not surprising. Coincidentally, a range of farming groups in recent days have called for the MDBA to be scrapped. Even the Productivity Commission in its report last year called for it to be split up.

However, building trust and transparency will not provide solutions or fix a flawed Basin Plan and how it interacts with the Murray Darling Agreement. While we acknowledged that transparency and communication have constantly been problems for the MDBA, what we really want is water, which can be delivered if issues around mismanagement are acknowledged and addressed.

Mr Keelty's report was clutching at straws, perhaps to justify the cost to taxpayers, when it makes only five recommendations and one of these is to include water literacy at high schools. Like all the other recommendations, this amazing thought-bubble will not help our farmers grow food and fibre. In fact, we view it as an insult to everyone who took the time to attend meetings, contribute submissions and yet again try to provide solutions that will lead to a fair and balanced Basin Plan, which is what governments promised but has not been delivered.

We accept that drought and low inflows have been a problem, as Mr Keelty points out. But the biggest problem is water mismanagement and it seems that will continue unabated.

Supported by: Murrumbidgee Valley Food and Fibre Producers (Debbie Buller 040414 374 312), Upper Goulburn Catchment Association (Jan Beer 0407 144 777), Central Murray Floodplain Environmental Group Inc (Chair - Doug Fehring 0488 568 327), Speak Up Campaign (Lachlan Marshall 0419 667 053)