

December 3, 2019

We've turned the corner, say rally organisers

“We have turned the corner.”

That was the welcome news presented to protesters by Convoy to Canberra organiser Chris Brooks early today, after marathon meetings yesterday.

Mr Brooks and his delegation concluded discussions last night with federal Minister for Water Resources David Littleproud and the Interim Inspector-General Murray-Darling Basin Water Resources (IIG) Mick Keelty with renewed hope.

“This is a turning point for our communities. It has been a tough battle, and that is why so many people have travelled to Canberra in an effort to have their voice heard. On behalf of all rally organisers, my sincere thanks to everyone who has made the trip to Canberra this week and supported our calls for a fair go.

“I am pleased to report it has not been a waste of time. We will leave with some major achievements and a belief that things are going to change,” Mr Brooks, who is also chair of Southern Riverina Irrigators, told protesters in an address outside Parliament House.

He said Mr Littleproud would call on states to support a review of the impact of the Basin Plan on state water sharing arrangements , and give Mr Keelty powers to investigate issues of concern across state and federal jurisdictions. If Mr Keelty is appointed to his position in a full-time capacity, which is expected to be approved by a meeting of Ministers on December 17, he will undertake a review that is to be completed by March 31, 2020.

Mr Brooks said he expects Mr Keelty will be given responsibility for providing our nation and its food producers with a fairer, more reasonable and workable Basin Plan “that is not going to waste the valuable resource that we must have to grow food for Australia”.

“The buck passing that we have been dealing with must stop, and we have confidence that Mr Keelty will be able to achieve this,” he said.

SRI Deputy Chair Darcy Hare, who was part of the delegation, said to have a candid discussion with the Minister behind closed doors and come out of it

“batting on the same team” was “a huge undertaking from the Minister that I did not expect”.

“He has assured us the Inspector-General is going to look at various aspects of state and federal water sharing, and he will be asking the states to give the Inspector-General the powers he needs to fix the Basin Plan.

“This is a huge win for us, and if the states are serious about developing a fair and equitable plan that protects our food producers, communities and the environment, they will give him the powers he needs,” Mr Hare said.

Rally co-organiser and Speak Up Campaign chair Shelley Scoullar said for the first time since Speak Up was formed as a voice for rural communities more than four years ago, she feels that we are heading in the right direction.

“It has been a long, hard battle. It should never have reached the point where we had to get over 2,000 angry farmers and their community supporters to travel to Canberra in protest. On behalf of rally organisers I want to thank each and every one for their effort, which it appears has been worthwhile.

“We also need to recognise the recent support from NSW Deputy Premier John Barilaro and Victorian Shadow Minister for Water Stephanie Ryan, who finally realised the damage the Basin Plan was causing to their communities and stood by us to demand change.

“The battle is not won yet and we are not getting ahead of ourselves. But for the first time since the Basin Plan was first mooted more than a decade ago we have some hope.

“We look forward to working with Minister Littleproud, Mr Keelty and their teams to ensure the changes that are needed to protect our communities and our nation’s food security are put in place,” Mrs Scoullar said.

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