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Changes needed to boost national food security

In this time of national crisis, it is essential we re-evaluate how we can efficiently use scarce water resources to support and protect our nation. Jan Beer, who is spokesperson for the Upper Goulburn River Catchment Association, says we need to learn from mistakes and use water to improve our national prosperity and food security.

“Our supermarket shelves are being stripped of vital products and we are struggling to keep up with demand. If Australia wants genuine food security into the future we have to repair the damage which has been caused to food producing regions and re-prioritise our needs,” Mrs Beer said.

She said a starting point would be the Federal Government announcing the suspension of all ongoing reviews, reports and inquiries relating to the Murray-Darling Basin Plan.

“The Murray-Darling Basin Authority continues to forge ahead with all aspects of the Basin Plan, despite the issues we are facing from COVID-19. All public meetings have been cancelled, so the promised consultation cannot take place.

“The suspension of effective consultation should be enough to force suspension of the Basin Plan,” Mrs Beer said.

She added it was disappointing that neither the Federal Government or the MDBA have expressed any concern that stipulated face to face consultation could not occur, which is a sad reflection on the poor community involvement that has dogged the plan throughout its development and implementation.

“In southern New South Wales there were supposed to be workshops to prepare the NSW Water Resource Plans, but they became teleconferences. This is completely unacceptable as the necessary in-depth discussion and interaction cannot possibly take place via telephone.”

Mrs Beer said at this difficult time communities are under enormous stress, however the MDBA had shown to this point that it cares little for our health

and wellbeing, which is highlighted by the fact it has failed to act on the socio-economic impacts from the Basin Plan and failed to display its much-touted “adaptive management” at any stage.

“The MDBA continually speaks about the need for healthy rivers, but seems to show little compassion for the health of people in the basin and the need for a ‘triple bottom line’ that takes into account the wellbeing of communities and farmers.

“It is also disappointing that new Water Minister Keith Pitt has not engaged with communities across the Basin. He made a whirlwind trip to the Southern Basin and promised to return and talk with farmers and their representative groups but hasn’t been sighted since.

“It is yet another example of failing consultation. I am concerned with what might happen with the Keelty Review, due out on March 31, because it came with a promise to take it back to regional meetings. Obviously this cannot happen in the foreseeable future.

“This review, the Water Sharing Plans, the general lack of consultation and the obvious failings of the Basin Plan leave us no choice. The plan must be suspended and water prioritised for food production so our nation can focus on better water management and improved farm productivity,” Mrs Beer said.

For interviews and further information: Upper Goulburn River Catchment Association Chair Jan Beer, phone 0407 144 777