

Speak Up Campaign Inc.

Inc 1800187

speakup4water@gmail.com



The Hon Scott Morrison MP
Prime Minister
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

December 17, 2020

Dear Prime Minister,

Last year in April you met our then Speak Up Campaign Chair Shelley Scoullar and Deputy Chair Lachlan Marshall in your office, with the Member for Farrer and then Water Minister David Littleproud.

Over 18 months have passed since we delivered our concerns and warnings to you regarding the environmental, social and economic destruction being caused by the Murray Darling Basin Plan on the Nation's iconic river systems.

As forecast by us, in that time southern NSW and northern Victoria have endured ongoing destruction, confusion and frustration from the complete lack of real policy debate and the development of solutions.

On November 27, 2020 State and Commonwealth Water Ministers and their advisors met to discuss and debate various Basin Plan issues. The NSW and Victorian water ministers worked collaboratively to recommend extending the legislative timeframes on projects which will further impact communities and the environment in their respective states.

The states had agreed to a full review of the Basin Plan in 2022, which would allow for adjustment in timelines and targets for unrealistic projects which the states know cannot be achieved, and as a consequence would place rural communities at risk of further buybacks, despite assurances from your Water Minister that this will not occur. The states were merely bringing forward an already scheduled legislative review.

It was extremely disappointing that Water Minister Pitt overruled the states, in particular the Victorian and NSW Governments who had worked hard to achieve solutions on behalf of their communities and the nation. This was especially deflating, as the federal water minister has not effectively engaged with our communities and has had only one brief visit to the region. We do not believe he has worked hard enough to understand the unique issues being faced in northern Victoria and southern NSW, nor the solutions required to overcome them.

With much regret, I advise that Minister Pitt is completely out of step with the communities and people in our region and the environmental challenges and solutions. Until he engages directly with communities he will continue to not receive the full picture. He will only hear a bureaucratic version of a Basin Plan that is not delivering the flexibility and adaptability we were promised, and nor are we getting the promised 'triple bottom line'.

Should there be further reductions to consumptive water availability, the impact on the region and further afield will be substantial. Southern NSW and Northern Victoria have contributed over 80% of the water recovered under the Basin Plan (this does not include water recovered under previous water reform programs). These communities have had a reduction of 30% in productive water available to industry. For the NSW Murray, the reliability of water allocations has reduced by roughly 30% since before the turn of the century. Our region has done the heavy lifting to deliver the Basin Plan to date and faces the greatest risk with the remaining implementation, yet we are getting minimal engagement from the responsible federal minister.

Speak Up Campaign Inc.

Inc 1800187

speakup4water@gmail.com



A key issue continually avoided by the Murray Darling Basin Authority and government stakeholders is the impact from flood plain harvesting (FPH) in the north on basin communities and connectivity of the system - two key principles of the plan. The decades long take of unlicensed and unmetered FPH water is significantly impacting the Darling River and irrigation allocations in the southern basin. The Darling River historically contributed on average 39 per cent of the fixed volume of 1850GL required by law to be delivered to South Australia annually. The shortfall is now taken from the southern part of the basin.

FPH storage in the north has increased by 142 per cent since the implementation of the 1994 cap, effectively stopping the Darling from flowing and stripping 721,000 ML of water from Victorian and NSW Murray general security license holders who are forced into 'topping up' the Darling's contribution.

The Sefton Report released in September 2020 provided a social and economic assessment of the conditions of the Murray Darling Basin as a reflection of the implementation of the Basin Plan. The Report sat idle on the Minister's desk for 5 months. In addition, recommendations made in the report have so far been completely disregarded, just like the countless other recommendations from all the previous inquiries and reports into the Basin Plan.

Minister Pitt indicated he wants communities to be at the heart of developing ideas and objectives for the remainder of the implementation of the Basin Plan. Our region and communities have borne the brunt of the plan's implementation and as such are critical to its deliverability. Yet we cannot get the Water Minister to engage with us to recognise the problems and discuss potential solutions.

The economic impost on our region, and as a consequence the entire nation, from the Basin Plan is considerable. We are putting staple food security at risk (despite what the bureaucrats want you to hear), there is significant environmental damage as a result of the current water management (despite what the bureaucrats want you to hear) and the damage to the trust of hardworking Australians who want a fair go will continue to be destroyed.

We want our Government to work to achieve better outcomes, for what is supposed to be a professionally prepared, science based and flexible plan.

Prime Minister we implore you to make a trip to the Murray region with your water minister, meet with representatives from our region and see firsthand our unique environment, so can comprehend what is at stake.

We ask your Government to intervene, work with all sides of politics to make Government policy correct, relevant and workable so our environment and economic future are both protected and enhanced. You need to stand up for good and effective government, which won't be easy, but is necessary. I look forward to your response and support.

Sincere Thanks

Lachlan Marshall

Speak Up Campaign Chair

0419 667 053