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Civil disobedience is 'around the corner'

The current state of agri-politics in Australia has been described as “a blight on food production and our nation”.

In some areas, in particular the food bowl region of southern NSW and northern Victoria, trust in politicians and farm advocacy groups continues to be eroded, according to Speak Up Campaign deputy chair Lachlan Marshall. He fears civil disobedience is “just around the corner”.

“I think frustrated farmers, who are traditionally so conservative, have been able to hold off from civil disobedience. However, I don’t think it can be contained much longer.”

Mr Marshall is part of a Speak Up delegation in Sydney this week to hear its petition being debated in the NSW Parliament.

The petition, tabled by the region’s Shooters Fishers & Farmers Member for Murray Helen Dalton, calls on the NSW Government to support a royal commission into the Murray-Darling Basin Plan, and the introduction of a National Water Register.

“To this point the NSW Berejiklian Government has ignored food producers in the southern part of the state. It has been prepared to support the big end of town, but we continue to be collateral damage.

“The great shame is that with some common-sense policies the inequities of the Basin Plan can be resolved. But to this point we do not have politicians or our peak advocacy groups showing any great desire to achieve this,” Mr Marshall said.

He said the National Water Register is a vital step to determine who holds water, who is trading it and whether they want the water for financial gain at the expense of food production.

“Everyone in any advocacy position, whether associated with state or national organisations, needs to declare their investment interests and those of their immediate family. This must include ownership of water, investments in

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corporate companies who trade water, especially below the Barmah Choke, or who are involved in Flood Plain Harvesting.

“The register must also include politicians and bureaucrats,” Mr Marshall said. If possible, it should date back to when the Basin Plan was being drafted.

He said the other issue which urgently needs addressing is the inadequacy of political and advocacy representation to fix the Basin Plan.

“We know this is a difficult political issue, especially with South Australia holding ‘four aces’ through the Murray Darling Agreement and arrangements which guarantee it gets huge quantities of water before anyone else receives a drop. SA seats are vital to the Federal Government, so it is not prepared to implement the solutions which are needed for fear of a backlash.

“At the same time, there are political agendas and ‘big players’ involved in our peak advocacy groups so they are reluctant to call out the appalling failures in the Basin Plan.

“As a consequence, Southern NSW and Northern Victoria are the sacrificial lambs, because politically they are considered expendable. But when is it okay to sacrifice communities and livelihoods in this manner? We don’t believe this is ever acceptable,” Mr Marshall said.

He added all this has led to a total erosion of trust in governments, their agencies and bureaucracies. They refuse to use best available science on which to base decisions, and the promise the Basin Plan would be ‘flexible and adaptable’ is “an unfortunate sick joke”. There is also no trust in their ability to treat everyone fairly and equally, and not be swayed by the “big end of town”.

“Those who are being hurt the most in this process are the producers who just want to get on with the job of producing food and fibre for their fellow countrymen, and others in need throughout the world. And, of course, the rural communities and jobs which depend on them,” he said.

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