

December 18, 2019

Some good results, but a lost opportunity

A Ministerial Council Basin Plan meeting in Brisbane yesterday (December 17) has been described as having “some good results”, but also a “massive lost opportunity”.

John Lolicato, representing organisers of the recent Convoy to Canberra, said this group welcomed the clear admissions of failing government policy.

“However, this was also a massive lost opportunity to review the Murray-Darling Basin Agreement, which is no longer fit for purpose, as it was written in 1915 at a time where monthly targets were necessary and predicated on paddle steamers as they were the building blocks for river communities.

“While over the years there have been a number of minor changes to the agreement, the water being sent downstream is meeting targets set for a different era. Now we have massive volumes of water under the agreement being sent down the system regularly; well above the volume that the natural constraints of the system allow,” Mr Lolicato said.

He said all that was requested of Basin Plan Inspector-General Mick Keelty was for him to investigate water under this agreement that is no longer required, such as the loss and dilution component, SA carryover on an already high security licence and increased transmission losses which are occurring as governments try to get an ever increasing volume of water downstream.

Mr Keelty still has scope to make states and federal agencies compliant, which includes targets such as 210GL of floodplain harvesting for the northern basin and using the best available science for the Lower Lakes management.

“The need for this effective management became even more evident when it was highlighted recently that 54 per cent of all available water to Southern NSW, Victoria and South Australia is currently sitting at the lower end of the system,” Mr Lolicato said.

Commenting on the 450 gegalitres of additional ‘upwater’, he said if NSW and Victoria are so confident it will not come from their states, as they claim, it needs to be taken off the table completely and removed from the Basin Plan.

“It will not fit down the system, as we have been saying for many years and reports now confirm, and would also have massive impacts on our regional communities, which are extremely important as they grow food and fibre for this nation.”

Mr Lolicato said the reassessment of the deliverability of the Sustainable Diversion Limit projects and their contribution to the 605GL is welcomed, and pointed out the Basin Plan targeted figures that have been proposed are “simply unachievable”.

“With many of the business cases, the community hasn’t had the opportunity to be assess them, and the few that have been published will impact on reliability of owned water entitlements in some valleys.

“These slight changes in direction by MinCo this week are important, but what they highlight is that these are all symptoms of a bad plan. The 450GL and 605GL are two key aspects of this Basin Plan that states have finally admitted are not delivering for the triple bottom line.

“We must never forget, this plan was meant to be developed upon to ‘promote and optimise’ and ‘act on the basis of the best available scientific knowledge and socioeconomic analysis’.

“Further implementation of the Basin Plan needs to stop, with the remaining funds quarantined, as this \$4.5 billion is distorting the water market and providing for infrastructure projects that will not achieve their targets.

“By not pulling this plan up immediately, state and federal leaders are allowing massive social, economic and environmental devastation - it’s really as simple as that,” Mr Lolicato concluded.

For further information or interviews contact: John Lolicato phone - 0428 539 226

Convoy to Canberra – an initiative of: Southern Riverina Irrigators, Murray Valley Private Diverters, Upper Goulburn River Catchment Association, Speak Up Campaign. Convoy to Canberra was supported by Central Murray Environmental Floodplain Group Inc, Campaigners for Regional Equality, Northern Victoria Irrigators, Sunraysia Citrus Growers Inc.

