



31 OCT, 2023

## Senator listens to buyback concerns

Gannawarra Times, Gannawarra



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# Senator listens to buyback concerns

INDEPENDENT senator David Van has visited Gunbower Forest to hear concerns about the proposed reintroduction of water buybacks by the Federal Government.

He met representatives of the Murray River Group of Councils, who invited the former Liberal senator as part of their campaign against the Water Amendment (Restoring Our Rivers) Bill 2023.

If the Bill is passed in November, it would allow reintroduction of voluntary water buybacks from farmers to meet environmental water targets as part of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan.

According to MRGC, previous experience and independent research showed water buybacks caused a raft of negative impacts on northern Victorian communities.

These impacts included \$500 million of lost productivity across the Goulburn-Murray Irrigation District each year, significant job losses and business closure.

MRGC chair Rob Amos said Murray River communities wanted their concerns to be heard and taken seriously.

“We appreciate Senator Van taking the time to visit our region to talk with our community about what’s at stake,” he said.

“It is only through talking and listening to the people who are directly impacted by water buybacks that the gravity of their reintroduction can really be understood.

“We are not only against the Australian Government reintroducing water buybacks, we are also against the government’s proposal to remove the socioeconomic impact test from the Basin Plan im-

plementation.

“It is akin to turning a blind eye to the broader social and economic consequences that buybacks can have on communities.

“Last time we had water buybacks, there was a 28 per cent decrease in milk production, which contributed to the closure of a milk processing plant.

“We lost 1600 jobs across the wider economy and some local sporting clubs became no longer viable.”

Cr Amos said the Murray River councils that made up the group supported the Basin Plan environmental outcomes but believed there were better alternatives to buybacks.

Water Minister Tanya Plibersek has said her government had already delivered more additional environmental water than the previous nine years.

Ms Plibersek said the government was happy to consider water-saving efficiency projects instead

of buybacks, and an agreement struck for the Bill, with three states and the ACT, allowed more time and funding for other projects.

As part of his visit, Senator Van visited Gunbower Forest to view one of the water-saving and efficiency projects under way in the Victorian Murray Floodplain Restoration Project.



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Farmer Andrew Tyler discusses concerns about water buybacks with senator David Van, centre.