

**Re: Water Amendment (Restoring Our Rivers) Bill 2023**

We were disappointed to hear the Government is pursuing the Water Amendment (Restoring the Rivers) Bill 2023 which will result in taking water out of the Murray Darling Basin and out of the communities which rely on it.

We oppose the progression of the Bill because enabling buybacks will destroy communities, compromise food security and pressure food and fibre process. It also does not have the support of states which is critical if the Commonwealth wants to have any chance of achieving the objectives of the Plan.

Changing long understood mechanisms to provide water for the environment by both removing the 1500 GL buyback cap and allowing 450GL efficiency water to be bought back, and especially without those buybacks being subject to the socio economic test. This flies clearly in the face of the comments by your Cabinet colleague and then water Minister Tony Burke who said in 2012 in relation to the 450GL (late) amendment that **‘The rule is it can only come from methods that have no downside, social or economic, so that’s the rule.’**

The economic downsides of this bill have been independently modelled in work commissioned by the Victorian Government. It found that using buybacks to recover all outstanding water – as this bill allows for – would reduce economic output in the Southern Basin by \$855 million annually, and put an end to 1,500 jobs.

In addition to that socio-economic devastation, buybacks will distort the water market and reduce the volume of food production in the midst of a domestic cost-of-living and global food security crisis. We remain opposed to buybacks in any form and urge the Government to transparently demonstrate that it has explored and exhausted all options for efficiency and complementary measures before progressing any further with this Bill.

Devastating communities to meet a volumetric outcomes that does not clearly deliver environmental gains is unacceptable to farmers and also unacceptable to the environment.

Regards

**Cordoma**

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