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MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

Local government seeks answers over lack of consultation on buybacks

The Murray Darling Association has called for the Federal Government to explain why it didn't consult local government over the purchase of significant parcels of water out of the Warrego River and Condamine-Balonne region.

This week the Federal Government announced it had spent \$78.89 million on purchasing 28 gigalitres from the Condamine-Balonne system, following earlier news that an undisclosed amount had been bought out of the Warrego River.

Local government and communities in both areas feel they have been blindsided by the buybacks, saying they have long been seeking a commitment that any further recoveries in their area occur via the Healthy Headwaters water efficiency program and other means.

Federal Member for Maranoa David Littleproud conceded that the buybacks were "not the most ideal outcome," saying he supported the amended Northern Basin recovery target of 320 gigalitres and calling on his parliamentary colleagues to approve the reduction from 390 gigalitres to provide certainty for communities.

Emma Bradbury, the chief executive officer of the Murray Darling Association, local government's peak body representing member councils across the Basin, welcomed Mr Littleproud's commitment to the 320 gigalitre target, but said communities and local government were angry because the latest buybacks had been completed without consultation.

"We know that buybacks have devastating impacts on communities and there has been an absolute lack of consultation with local government and community," she said.

"Local government should have been consulted first so it was able to prepare for the consequences."

Paroo Shire Council Mayor, Cr Lindsay Godfrey said his community had believed there were to be no water buybacks on the Warrego.

“MDBA consultation stated that there were no purchases necessary on the Warrego and the Northern Basin Advisory Committee also believed there were to be no purchases,” he said.

“It was supposed to be a new era of consultation on the Basin Plan, but this is the opposite.”

Cr Richard Marsh, Mayor of Balonne Shire Council and MDA Chairman of Region 12, said his community was deeply unhappy that it not been notified nor consulted, after advocating long and hard for water savings in the Condamine-Balonne to be delivered through Healthy Headwaters and other initiatives rather than through buybacks.

“This buyback doesn’t appear to have any sound socio-economic research behind it, so it’s recommitting the sins of the past,” he said.

Cr Marsh said the MDA Regions across the Basin were united in the opinion that the Murray Darling Association needed a seat at the table to ensure local knowledge informed decisions on matters such as buybacks, and allow local government to be proactive rather than reactive.

The Balonne Shire Council called for equitable financial support for communities across the region to boost industry and employment.

“If the Government can provide \$78 million for a single purchase, Paroo and Balonne look forward to sharing in a similar amount to rebuild their communities,” Balonne Shire CEO Matthew Magin said.

Ms Bradbury said the Murray Darling Association fully supported local calls for government investment in both communities to help offset the impacts of the buyback and said the Federal Government needed to move quickly to approve the amended Northern Basin water recovery target to give certainly to local communities.

“If Basin-related decisions are to be properly informed by local knowledge, it is essential that local government has a meaningful role in that process,” she said.

“We support the call by councils across the basin for local government, through the MDA, to be included in the Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council and Basin Officials Committee.”

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