



Mr. Sam Birrell MP
Federal Member for Nicholls

Media Release

Wednesday September 6th, 2023

Plibersek's Plan a Travesty for Basin Communities

Federal member for Nicholls Sam Birrell says irrigators, basin communities and the regions productivity will be smashed by the Albanese Government's failure to listen to warnings about using destructive buybacks to recover more water for the environment.

Water Minister Tanya Plibersek introduced the Water Amendment (Restoring Our Rivers) Bill 2023 on September 6.

"This bill confirms our worst fears, Labor is committed to completing the Murray Darling Basin Plan, including securing an additional 450 gigalitres and is prepared to use expensive and destructive water buybacks to do it," Mr Birrell said.

"The legislation was introduced without an exposure draft, and briefings were only provided to irrigator and farming groups and Shadow Water Minister Senator Perin Davey at the last minute, yet the Minister boldly claimed lengthy consultation."

If passed the Murray Darlin Basin Plan will be radically changed by:

- Removing the 1,500 GL cap on Commonwealth water purchases.
- Using water buybacks to recover an additional 450Gl from irrigators.
- "Transitional assistance" for communities impacted by water purchases which will be a pittance compared to the generational loss of agricultural production.

"Every remaining barrier put in place by the Coalition to protect regional communities, productive agriculture and value adding food processing will be removed by this legislation," Mr Birrell said.

"What it proves is that the Albanese Government only cares about the water recovery number, not the harm it will cause achieving it."

"Minister Plibersek told Parliament that the environment and farmers are equal, and one isn't prioritised over the other, but her legislation does nothing to protect productive agriculture and the industry and communities that rely on it."

"This blows up the Murray Darling Basin Plan and it will inflict untold harm on communities and push up the cost of healthy food for all Australians."

Mr Birrell said while the former Coalition Government backed an agreement to only recover the additional 450Gl if there was no negative socio-economic impact on communities, that is scrapped under Labor's plan.

"That section of the Water Act is replaced with a weak clause that the Water for the Environment Special Account 'can include payments that address any detrimental social and economic impact on the wellbeing of any community', in other words, communities will be damaged first and might be compensated later."

“This is tearing up a commitment agreed to by all Basin states in 2018 to protect communities from further social and economic harm.”

“Delivering the water will also cause environmental degradation along our rivers.”

“It is a travesty, and I will oppose the legislation.”

Media Advisor - Federal Member for Nicholls Sam Birrell MP
Morgan Dyer | 0412 832 474 | Morgan.dyer@aph.gov.au