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Sheed calls on Victorian Government to take a stand on water policy

Independent member for the Shepparton District Suzanna Sheed this week again called on Water Minister Lisa Neville and the state government to protect Victorian water users and the local environment from mismanagement of the Murray Darling Basin Plan.

“It is time the Victorian government stood up to the Murray-Darling Basin Authority and the federal government,” Ms Sheed told state parliament.

“(The) Victorian government has been the good guy for too long and it is time the Victorian government takes on the Murray-Darling Basin Authority, takes legal proceedings and demands that something be done to protect our rivers here—particularly while we see northern New South Wales right now flood plain harvesting, into huge dams, irrigation water for themselves.”

The damage being perpetrated by misuse of the Plan is wide ranging, according to Ms Sheed.

“The Murray-Darling Basin Authority has taken it on itself to override the Victorian minister’s authority and has taken steps to demand that 50 000 megalitres of water a day be provided by way of inter-valley transfer down the river. The negative impacts of this are enormous, and steps must be taken to stop it,” Ms Sheed said.

“Just last week in the lower Goulburn River at Murchison it was running at 1.8 metres. Its normal, environmentally safe flow for this time of year in February would be about 50 centimetres, so it is running at four times the height it normally would; and it is cold, and it is high, and all that water is destroying the fish, the river red gums and the river banks and leaving the Goulburn Valley. The Murray-Darling Basin Authority needs to stop this. It is a breach of both federal and state environmental legislation.

“The Goulburn—the lower Goulburn—is one of the last strongholds anywhere in the world for trout cod, silver perch and Murray spiny crays, not to mention Murray cod. It is now being trashed and made into an irrigation ditch with cold summer flows.”

Ms Sheed noted Minister Neville had taken steps to write to the new Federal Minister for Water, Keith Pitt, to protest flood plain harvesting undertaken by Northern Basin irrigators.

“I am concerned we are going around in circles while the damaging status quo continues,” Ms Sheed said.

“It is welcoming to see Minister Pitt visiting the Mildura Region this week and is seeking to meet with Victorian stakeholders, but time ran out long ago. My region cannot wait for another round of meetings, for another consultation, for another review. I’m troubled we have the eighth federal water minister in ten years and it all just seems like ‘Groundhog Day.’

“We cannot afford to lose another dairy farmer, another irrigator, another part of our the very valuable agricultural industry in my region while the local environment is trashed.”

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