

April 6, 2020

Dear NSW / Vic Members of Parliament,

**Upper Goulburn
River Catchment
Association**



As staple food producers across southern NSW and northern Victoria we are calling on your support to enable us to play our role in getting our country back on track when we get through the current COVID 19 crisis.

Southern NSW and northern Victoria is where a large portion of our country's staple foods are produced, such as rice, milk, wheat, barley, canola, fruit, corn, vegetables, chicken, beef and lamb, amongst others.

We acknowledge that there is no need for panic buying, however we must note that eastern states have been importing wheat for bread and flour, along with dairy products for over twelve months. Just recently SunRice announced it would have to import rice to meet demands, this is directly the result of reduced irrigated agriculture in the Southern Connected System (SCS). What is of major concern is our capacity to restock our food supplies.

Irrigated agriculture is what has allowed our country to produce enough food to feed 75 million people, however this figure predates the impacts of very low and zero allocation across the SCS over the last two years.

The SCS was built and is reliant on irrigated agriculture. Our farmers are best placed to work in isolation and to put actions in place to ignite the economy. Primary production can drive multiple facets of our national economy through employment on farm, manufacturing, retail, supply chain, logistics, agricultural supply services and the list goes on. Our farmers are ready to step up and, once again, be the back bone of this country.

However, in order for this to be facilitated, they need access to their most important inputs and in our irrigation areas, the most important input to reach our full productive potential is, most definitely, water.

Right now thousands of our irrigation farmers are in decision making mode and with a very large number facing a third year of zero or very low allocations, they simply can't take the risk of planting crops without some water security. With the knowledge of having some secure access to water, farmers will have the confidence to invest in crops which will immediately start to pay dividends.

We are asking you to take the unprecedented action of seeking bipartisan support from your fellow Parliament Members to work with the federal government to –

- Investigate all options to deliver emergency water allocations to southern connected system food producers with general security or equivalent licences, including held environmental water accounts and other 'rules based' water.



**Central Murray
Environmental
Floodplains Group
Inc**



**NSW Farmers
Bunnaloo Branch**



- While our supply chains are in jeopardy, use a Govt subsidy to facilitate the return of all held water in non-farmer/non-producer accounts to the productive pool for the southern connected system.

This water must be returned as allocation to producers, not under any program. It needs to be provided to landholdings only and be non-tradable outside the valleys it is allocated to. As South Australia has not been subject to reduced allocations and will receive adequate allocation again this year, it is not necessary for South Australia to be included in this unprecedented emergency declaration other than South Australia releasing held water in government and non-farmer/non producer accounts.



Without an allocation this year many Southern NSW and Northern Victorian producers will struggle to go on and our nation will lose even more of its valuable farmers and further endanger our Nation's food security.



We beg you not to let an opportunity be wasted. Now is the time to act, so those who can drive the nation out of this disaster are provided with the tools they need to again be productive. Irrigated agriculture has the ability to meet our food supply needs, along with producing enough for export, thus stimulating employment, confidence and the economy. All of Australia needs to see that our governments are prepared to make the tough decisions to put us back on track.



The bureaucracy and departments will tell you there is no water available, however through flexibility and compromise water could be made available. We are currently compiling background information on all options for sourcing water for staple food production. We will continue to update this information as our research evolves.

Please use this link to understand where the water can be found:

[Where to find emergency water](#)

**Campaigners for
Regional Equality**

Yours sincerely,

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On behalf of

Organisations listed



**Darren De Bortoli
(De Bortoli Wines)**

Sumar Produce

**Baxters –
Namarang**