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People Forgotten in Pipeline Debate – “The Grapes of Wrath” revisited.

Country Alliance spokesman Russell Bate predicted a bleak outlook for many Victorian rural communities if the Victorian state government continues with its plans for the North South Pipeline.

“It is hard to imagine what is driving the government’s obstinate persistence with plans for the pipeline” he said.

“The plans have received widespread criticism from within the party, opposition from affected communities and their councils, have been the subject of a scathing report by the state’s Auditor-General, Des Pearson and have been clearly demonstrated to be seriously flawed in the assumptions on which they are based and yet the government pushes stubbornly on.

The 900 gegalitre “Foodbowl Modernisation Project” savings claimed by the pipeline proponents, are based on a full irrigation season with 100% allocations. With the water to be traded out of the Goulburn Murray system and the likelihood of the Federal plan reducing total water available for irrigation by 30%, these savings can’t be reached” Mr. Bate added.

“With more than a thousand Victorian irrigators already lost to farming and another 1200 to be removed from the irrigation district as part of the Foodbowl Modernization Project, one can only wonder at what the human cost of this scheme will be.

Many Victorian regional communities have been built around these farms and the families who have farmed them, in many cases for generations. The economic flow-on to the wider communities of their loss will be huge and in many cases will see an effective end to some of the smaller irrigation towns. The Sunraysia irrigator Lindsay Leake recently asked “... what is going to happen to all these Murray River refugees who leave their land.”; a good question for our state and federal governments.

While there is no doubt that this government is reaping the consequences of 40 years of neglect of Victoria’s water storages by all parties and the “No Dams” ideology that has brought us to this point, the human cost of the pipeline “quick fix” should be unacceptable to all Victorians.

John Steinbeck’s 1939 novel “The Grapes of Wrath” documented the plight of American farm families forced to leave their farms by drought and unable to find other employment during the depression. These farmers and their families subsequently lived and died in cramped, impoverished camps called “Hooverilles,” named after President Hoover.”

Let’s hope that we don’t see “Hooverilles” in Victoria.” Bate said.

For media comment contact Russell Bate

Website: www.countryalliance.org

Admin: admin@countryalliance.org / ph 0425 746 066