

Latrobe Irrigators unite against mine-fill plan

A new group has been formed by Latrobe River irrigators concerned about access to water and opposed to plans to fill Latrobe Valley coal mines with water.

Latrobe River Irrigators Group was established formally at a meeting in Glengarry last night.

The group represent irrigators who access water from the Latrobe running from an area from Yallourn to downstream of Sale.

Interim spokesman Angus Zilm said he was pleased by the turn-out of around 45 irrigators who came to raise concerns regarding their existing irrigation allocation security and voice further support the development of irrigation in the region.

“We have a significant number of farmers along the Latrobe who rely on irrigation water to maintain productive farms. These irrigators are now united as one voice, and we hope to add more numbers over time.

“Much of last night’s meeting involved discussions about plans to fill Hazelwood and other Latrobe Valley coal mines with our precious freshwater resource as part of their rehabilitation strategy. There was a unanimous show of opposition to this plan and a great level of concern.

“We don’t believe the community has been given all the information about alternatives or about the potential cost to water users downstream such as us.

“We also believe there are opportunities for further irrigation development. Given there is unallocated water in the Latrobe system we will be actively lobbying to protect our entitlements and expand opportunities for farming in the region.

“Irrigators are happy to work with government to develop a sustainable plan to rehabilitate the mine sites however fresh water should primarily be used to grow food and fibre which will create jobs, attract investment and importantly service the ever growing demand for Australia’s premium produce. Not to simply be put into a stagnant pit in the ground when there are other options.

“We now have the opportunity to turn Gippsland into an Agricultural powerhouse that will not only feed the nation and world markets, it will show that Victoria is serious about Agriculture and food security.

“In a climate that is becoming more variable with droughts, fires and floods, the expansion and development of the Irrigation system along the Latrobe River will provide long term economic security, an opportunity cannot be passed up.”

The meeting was also attended by Gippsland South MP Danny O’Brien.

Mr Zilm said the group would now be taking its concerns to State Government and raising the profile of the importance of reliable irrigation entitlements in the Latrobe system.