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MEDIA RELEASE

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Pipeline construction angers farmers

Lack of consultation during the planning for the construction of the Bendigo to Ballarat pipeline has angered Newlyn and district farmers says David Koch, Member for Western Victoria.

Mr Koch said that the Bracks Government's and Central Highlands Water's failure to consult with affected landholders shows contempt to farmers struggling with the drought and frustration of not knowing their immediate future.

"Over a month ago along with other local members of Parliament, I attended a public meeting at Newlyn where representatives from Central Highlands Water and the Department of Sustainability and Environment heard disgruntled local landholders vent their frustration over the manner in which this project is being implemented.

"While a pipeline route has been roughly mapped out with pipes ordered and tenders called for the construction contractor, a failure to consult in the planning process has left landholders worried that there is no strategy for laying the pipeline on private property.

"Newlyn farmers cultivate some of the most productive soil in Victoria and they have a right to be concerned that their certified seed potato paddocks have been put at risk from soil disturbance, soil and rock separation, soil compaction and weed contamination due to the trenching process.

"Among other things, the depth of the pipeline is still to be determined and while the 600mm suggested is insufficient and farmers are asking it be at least a metre deep as they don't want to be held responsible for fracturing the pipeline when cultivating their paddocks.

"Central Highlands Water has been unclear in relation to land valuation completion, the defined route of the pipeline on private property and the ramifications inherent with the ongoing successful farming operations of the affected landholders.

"Landholders are sick of the arrogance of the Bracks Government and Central Highlands Water consultants who have blatantly entered their properties with a demand to sign off on the project without consultation or how it might affect their livelihoods in the future.

"Landholders want to know why the project remains un-costed, why no consideration has been given to the impact on heritage or indigenous sites and land use along the proposed route.

"Is it any wonder that these landholders remain edgy and frustrated in relation to the proposed pipeline which to date Central Highlands Water and its consultants have not seen fit to disclose the process involved that would allow closure for those most affected?

"Although Government members, Mr Howard and Ms Pulford, left those at the meeting in little doubt that they clearly heard the concerns of landholders, and that a landholder reference group was agreed to, but no action to date has taken place to allay landholder fears. Hopefully next Monday's meeting will give farmers an outcome that both the Government and its agencies have denied them so far", said Mr Koch.

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