



MEDIA RELEASE

Senator the Hon Penny Wong

Minister for Climate Change and Water

PW 10/08

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DROUGHT ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE MURRAY DARLING BASIN TO CONTINUE

Special water sharing arrangements in the Murray Darling Basin will continue into 2009 as a result of climate change and the prolonged drought.

Minister for Climate Change and Water, Senator Penny Wong said the arrangements had been approved by the Prime Minister and the First Ministers of Victoria, New South Wales, South Australia and the ACT under the Murray Darling Basin contingency planning process.

In its seventh report to First Ministers, the Senior Officials Group responsible for contingency planning warned of a 75 per cent chance there would be less water available in the River Murray system in June 2008 than there was in June 2007.

“Despite the recent flooding in Queensland, we are still a long way from being able to resume normal operations in the Murray Darling Basin,” Senator Wong said.

“The situation across the Basin remains very serious, and the cooperative approach being taken by the States to share water through this difficult time is commendable.

“The Rudd Government is committed to working with the States to ensure the Murray Darling Basin is healthy and provides a sustainable water supply.”

Senator Wong said the States would now implement measures to ensure the critical human needs of Adelaide and towns reliant on the Murray continue to be met throughout 2008/09.

The Murray Darling Basin contingency planning process was established on Melbourne Cup Day in 2006 to ensure the critical drinking water needs of people reliant on the Murray – including Adelaide residents - were able to be met following the unprecedented dry conditions across the Basin in 2006.

When the contingency planning process was established, it was envisaged normal operation of the Basin would resume in 2007, but continued low inflows mean the transition back to normal Murray Darling Basin operations is very unlikely to take place in 2008.

The two year period to November 2007 recorded the lowest ever inflow to the Murray River.

Inflows during this period were 43 per cent lower than the previous record low, which occurred at the end of 1938.

Senator Wong said the Prime Minister and First Ministers had agreed in full to the recommendations of the Murray Darling Basin Drought Contingency Senior Officials Group as set out in the joint statement released today.