



# MEDIA RELEASE

**Senator the Hon Penny Wong**

*Minister for Climate Change and Water*

---

PW 131/08

20 July 2008

## **DRINKING WATER STILL FIRST PRIORITY IN SOUTHERN BASIN**

Special water sharing arrangements to secure the critical human needs of Adelaide and other towns reliant on the Murray River will need to remain in place throughout 2008/09.

A joint statement from Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and the governments of New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and the ACT warns that the water outlook across the southern Murray Darling Basin has further deteriorated between March and June this year.

Minister for Climate Change and Water, Senator Penny Wong, said water available for households, irrigators and the environment remained at record low levels across much of the Basin.

“More than one million people draw their drinking water from the Murray, so it’s essential that we continue to make critical human needs our number one priority,” Senator Wong said.

“Longer-term, tackling the problems in the Murray Darling Basin requires serious action on climate change.

“Last week we took the next step in tackling climate change with the release of a Green Paper on a new scheme to reduce the carbon pollution that causes climate change.

“The situation in the Murray Darling Basin demonstrates that doing nothing on climate change is not an option.”

The joint statement says:

- Hot and dry conditions in autumn 2008 in the southern Basin have resulted in diminished tributary inflows and increased water losses.
- Inflows could remain well below average even with above average rainfall in 2008/09 because the dry state of the catchments has reduced run-off.
- Several years of above average rainfall is likely to be required if the system is to fully recover.
- The Bureau of Meteorology’s seasonal outlook for July to September shows increased chances of drier conditions in the southern part of the Murray Darling Basin.

“Higher than normal temperatures have increased evaporation and exacerbated water quality concerns, particularly in the Lower Lakes,” Senator Wong said.

The Commonwealth recently committed \$200 million for the South Australian Government to accelerate work on a lasting solution for the Lower Lakes.

A further \$120 million is being provided by the Commonwealth to secure water supplies for people currently reliant on the Lower Lakes by building pipelines that provide access to fresh water from further upstream in the River Murray.

The Rudd Government recently committed \$3.7 billion to Murray Darling Basin water-saving projects as part of the \$12.9 billion *Water for the Future* plan.

“Our \$12.9 billion investment in water is helping Australia adjust to the impacts of climate change that cannot be avoided,” Senator Wong said.

The Australian Government and Basin States signed an historic agreement in Sydney earlier this month to establish a new independent authority to manage the Murray Darling Basin, ending years of neglect, mismanagement and blame shifting.