

News Release

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Hon Jay Weatherill

Minister for Environment &
Conservation
Acting Minister for Water Security

Hon Paul Caica

Minister for Agriculture, Food & Fisheries
Acting Minister for the River Murray

Thursday, 13 August 2009

GOVERNMENT ACTS ON WATER AND LOWER LAKES

Environment and Conservation Minister Jay Weatherill and Minister for Agriculture, Food & Fisheries Paul Caica today announced three immediate steps to deal with low water flows in the River Murray primarily caused by over-allocation and over-extraction of water in upstream States.

Of all of the water extracted from the Murray Darling system, South Australia receives only seven per cent – compared to the 93 per cent taken out upstream by NSW, Victoria and Queensland.

As part of its emergency response to this ongoing situation, the South Australian Government will:

- provide 50 billion litres of environmental water for the Lower Murray Lakes.
- purchase up to an additional 60 billion litres of water for Adelaide and other communities.
- provide grants to irrigators to help keep permanent plantings alive over summer.

“Over-allocation of water in upstream States and the on-going severe drought mean South Australia will receive near record low inflows from the River Murray,” Mr Weatherill said.

“Our State is working for a national solution to the over-allocation crisis.

“And although we can’t solve the problem alone, we can assure water supply through these measures.”

Mr Weatherill said 50 gigalitres of environmental water will be released over the summer to mitigate environmental damage to Lake Alexandrina.

“The Government planned ahead and purchased this water earlier this year,” he said.

“Fifty billion litres will be released this summer to provide vital fresh water for Lake Alexandrina when it will be needed most.

“We remain committed to a freshwater solution for the lakes. Their plight is a direct result of not enough freshwater flowing down the Murray.

“This summer’s release of environmental water will help protect against acidification - but it must be emphasised that only working nationally to end decades of upstream States taking more can restore them to long-term health.

“For decades, the upstream States have been taking more and more water out of the Murray.

“In the short-term we are doing all we can to protect the Lower Murray Lakes, and the release of this environmental water is a crucial part of our strategy.

“The Government will also release the next steps in its long-term plan to save the Coorong and Lower Murray Lakes shortly. This plan follows extensive public feedback.”

Mr Weatherill said the Government will also purchase up to 60 billion litres for critical human needs in Adelaide and other communities across the State to be available, should it be needed, in 2010 – 11.

“Adelaide and other communities have sufficient water for this summer, but we need to guarantee supply for next summer before the desalination plant begins full operation. The Government is planning ahead,” he said.

“We are also working to end upstream States’ over-use of water. And we will continue our conservation and stormwater capture programs.

“But South Australians also expect guaranteed water supply, and today’s purchase delivers just that.”

The Government also announced a program aimed at assisting River Murray irrigators who are struggling to keep their plantings alive in the face of record low allocations.

“The Government remains committed to supporting our drought-affected communities and agricultural industries,” Mr Caica said.

The Government will provide grants to irrigators along the River Murray who have to purchase water to keep their permanent plantings alive over the upcoming season.

“Irrigators’ allocations are currently at 5 per cent and if low inflows into the Murray-Darling Basin continue, many will purchase water just to keep their plantings alive,” Mr Caica said.

“Grape vines, fruit trees and other permanent crops in the Riverland are a vital part of the State’s economy.

“If we let permanent plantings die this summer, not only will it have a devastating effect on irrigators and their local communities, but on the State as a whole.”