

Thursday, 6 March 2008

SA SEEKS NATIONAL SUPPORT FOR LAKES RESCUE

The South Australian Government will seek recognition of the dire situation at the Lower Lakes from other States at tomorrow's meeting of the Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council in Sydney.

"The South Australian Government has made it clear to Senator Penny Wong that a condition of our signing up to the National Plan is that there be a specific allocation of water for the Murray Mouth," Minister for the River Murray Karlene Maywald said.

"At the Ministerial Council meeting, the Government will also seek support for a proposal to pump water into Lake Albert from Lake Alexandrina to prevent soil acidification.

"Sections of Lake Alexandrina and Lake Albert are exposed because of receding shorelines, and as a result, some parts are developing acid sulphate soils.

"This is a critical time for the Lower Lakes because of continued low flows to South Australia as a consequence of the current extreme drought.

"Under normal conditions, water flows into Lake Albert from Lake Alexandrina. However this flow has become restricted with the build up of silt in the entrance to Lake Albert.

"Careful monitoring of the lakes is indicating that if we don't act now, the ecological collapse of Lake Albert could occur.

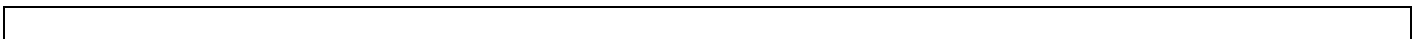
"If Lake Albert's water level drops much further, 150 square kilometres of lake bed will be exposed and will acidify, potentially causing acid levels in the water to increase rapidly.

"This would kill fish, vegetation and other aquatic life, and make the water unusable for stock or domestic use."

The proposal for the council includes building a temporary pump and embankment next to the ferry at Narrung to pump water into Lake Albert to maintain critical minimum water levels, cover these soils and prevent acidification.

"This temporary solution would be in place by mid-April and about 400 megalitres would be pumped each day into Lake Albert," Minister Maywald said.

"The temporary embankment and pumps would remain in place at least until October 2008 when the impacts of winter rainfall and inflows can be assessed.



“Pumping will have a minor effect on water levels in Lake Alexandrina but only to the extent which would have occurred naturally if the entrance to Lake Albert had not been restricted due to the build up of silt.

“This project is not about increasing the level of Lake Albert to pre-drought levels. It is about maintaining its current water level at least until winter rains commence.

“Other options, including dredging the Narrung Narrows, were considered but pumping was found to be the quickest and most effective option that would cause least disturbance to the ecology of the Narrung Narrows.

“Government representatives and potential contractors will inspect the site during the coming week to assess the level of work required.”

A Frequently Asked Questions document has been produced with further detail of this project. It is available at www.dwlbc.sa.gov.au/murray/drought/index.html

