

7 March, 2008

MINISTERS AGREE TO SUPPORT LAKE RESCUE PLAN

Minister for the River Murray Karlene Maywald and Minister for Environment and Conservation Gail Gago are extremely pleased with the overwhelming support provided by all States and the Commonwealth for a project to rescue Lake Albert at today's Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council meeting in Sydney.

“As a result of this serious situation, a \$6 million emergency measure to pump water into Lake Albert from Lake Alexandrina to prevent soil acidification and reduce the risk of environmental damage was supported,” said Minister Maywald.

“The Ministerial Council recognised that the extreme drought has exacerbated the effect of continued low flows to the Lower Lakes, Coorong and Murray Mouth, resulting in some very serious environmental concerns and significant hardship for communities.

Minister Gago welcomes this initiative that will help to prevent a catastrophic environmental event at this valuable international Ramsar site, which would otherwise take decades to recover.

The council also asked the Murray-Darling Basin Commission to provide a progress report on the condition of the Lower Lakes at its May 2008 meeting and to develop risk management strategies and future management options – medium and long term – for the Coorong and Lower Lakes that capture the best available science and strike a balance between the environmental, economic and social values of the site.

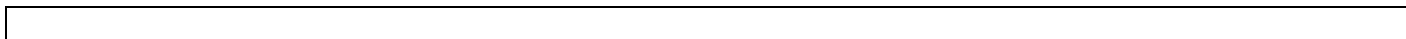
“I'm very pleased the council recognised that this is a basin-wide issue and that responsibility for managing these problems must be shared. Ministers will be visiting the region in May to see the seriousness of the situation,” said Minister Maywald.

“In this context, council also asked the commission to report to the next council meeting on the status of all other Ramsar and key environmental sites in the basin.

The Ministerial Council also approved the construction of a \$30.2 million salt interception scheme at Murtho in the Riverland.

“The Murtho scheme will intercept up to 100 tonnes of salt per day on average through a series of groundwater bores along the southern bank of the River Murray between Renmark and the Victorian border.

“A total of 570 tonnes of salt per day will be stopped from entering the River Murray with the addition of the Murtho scheme, the approved Waikerie Lock 2 scheme, the Loxton scheme which is



currently under construction, and the Bookpurnong, Woolpunda, and Waikerie schemes already in operation.

“This is a massive 208,000 tonnes of salt per year which is vitally important in addressing long-term salinity management in South Australia.”

At today’s meeting, South Australia became the first state, along with Victoria, to hand over control of water recovered for environmental flows to the Murray-Darling Basin Commission.

“South Australia has put 13 gigalitres of water on the Living Murray Environmental Water Register for use at the basin’s six icon sites.

“The water will be used on an annual basis for important environmental outcomes such as improved conditions for water bird breeding, healthier wetlands, protection of floodplain areas and River Red Gums, and an open Murray Mouth.

“This is the first confirmed water on the register and is a major milestone for South Australia and the Living Murray first step target of returning 500GL to the river by June 2009.

“South Australia is on track to secure its share of the target – 35GL.

The council was also advised that an important strategy dealing with the risks to shared water resources in the Murray-Darling Basin will be released in late April 2008.

“At the last council meeting in May 2007, South Australia pushed to have the strategy prepared as soon as possible, after the CSIRO had identified six key risks to our shared resources – climate change, farm dams, irrigation return flows, groundwater extraction, afforestation and bushfires.

“The strategy has important links to the work CSIRO is currently finalising on the sustainable yield of Murray-Darling Basin catchments.

“South Australia looks forward to further information at the next council meeting about how the basin states are implementing strategies to manage these risks.”

