

Friday, 6 June 2008

### **RIVER MURRAY SPENDING CONTINUES IN 2008-09 STATE BUDGET**

The State Government is planning to spend \$260 million over the next four years to protect and improve the health of the River Murray.

Minister for the River Murray Karlene Maywald says the funding commitment is amongst the highest allocated by a South Australian Government to the Murray and builds on the existing substantial support.

In addition, and separate to the budget process, the State Government is finalising its proposal for major funding under the Federal Government's \$12.9 billion Water for the Future program.

"A key component of the project will be aimed at securing a long-term sustainable future for irrigation communities in the context of climate change and reduced water availability in the future as well as delivery of substantial and lasting returns of water to the environment to secure improvements in river health," she said.

Minister Maywald says the State Budget investment includes \$56 million over four years for water recovery, including buying back water licences from willing sellers to return water to the river for environmental flows.

"Part of this water will contribute to the Murray-Darling Basin's Living Murray Initiative first step target of returning 500 gegalitres of water to the river by June 2009," she said.

"South Australia's share of this is 35 GL and we are confident we will recover this by the deadline.

"The longer term target outlined in South Australia's strategic plan is to return 1500 gegalitres across the basin to the river by 2018."

Minister Maywald says in 2008-09, more than \$23 million will go to the Murray-Darling Basin Commission for projects in South Australia.

"This includes building fishways through the river's locks, dredging to keep the Murray Mouth open and managing salinity through Riverland salt interception schemes," she said.

"It will also support construction of an environmental regulator in the Chowilla Creek to improve floodplain health as well as other projects for the Lower Lakes, Coorong and River Murray channel icon sites."

In other River Murray projects, the State Government will:

- Upgrade Riverland Waste Disposal Stations, costing \$2.05 million over four years.
- Develop a water allocation plan for the Eastern Mount Lofty Ranges catchment, which contributes freshwater and stream flows to the Murray.

- Continue to fund the River Murray Environmental Manager to oversee wetland and floodplain planning and management to make best use of the small volumes of environmental water available during the drought.
- Spend \$3.22 million over four years on irrigation research and education on technology use.
- Upgrade the Riverland Drainage Disposal System, to reduce impacts of irrigation drainage on the river environment.
- Continue to closely monitor water quality and manage wetlands and environmental flows.

“While the current drought is taking a major toll on our river system, this record funding contribution will enable us to continue planning and working on projects to benefit the river now and when the drought breaks and flows become available,” Minister Maywald said.