
SYDNEY Thursday 3 July 2008

RANN'S BID ACHIEVES \$610 MILLION FOR RIVER MURRAY IN SA

Premier Mike Rann says South Australia has secured \$610 million for priority projects that could result in water savings of more than 100 gegalitres of water in the Murray Darling Basin system at today's COAG meeting in Sydney.

Mr Rann says he is delighted that the Intergovernmental Agreement between all Murray Darling Basin States and the Commonwealth was also signed at the COAG meeting that will trigger the start of \$3.7 billion in infrastructure works along the entire length of the Basin.

“I came to Sydney today to make sure this agreement was signed.

“This is a stunning result for South Australia and a victory for the environment.

“In addition, a significant agreement was reached today for the States to work toward lifting the trading cap on water between regions along the Murray Darling Basin from four to six per cent by the end of 2009, with a view to the complete removal of the trading cap by 2014.

“This will help in the process of purchasing water licences along the River to return that water for environmental flows – which will be especially important to South Australia's Lower Lakes and the Coorong.

“Our task now will be to get moving on our \$610 million of priority projects that will help secure the future of the River Murray – and especially the Lower Lakes and the Coorong and for our valuable irrigation and agricultural communities.

“Today we have secured \$120 million to completely re-engineer the water infrastructure within the townships, communities and irrigators that draw water from the Lower Lakes.

“This project will see an end to the use of water from the Lower Lakes by those communities and vastly improve their water security and water quality.

“Instead, they would be connected to high quality water drawn from the River Murray at around Tailem Bend via a new integrated network of pipelines around the Lower Lakes communities and farms that would link to the existing pipelines.

“Irrigation pipelines will be built to supply to Currency Creek and Langhorne Creek and potable water pipes will go to the Narrung and Paltaloch Peninsulas and the Raukkan Aboriginal Community.

“Aspects of this project can start almost immediately and the entire project could be finished within two years.

“In addition, we have achieved funding of \$200 million to undertake medium to long term projects around the Lower Lakes and Coorong to help save and protect the future of this valuable Ramsar site.

“To accelerate this work, the Commonwealth has agreed to advance \$10 million immediately to our State to undertake the feasibility work necessary to fast track this important project.

“This would include investigating and consulting the community on a range of new infrastructure works that would enable the better environmental management of the Lower Lakes – especially in terms of addressing hyper-saline water from the southern lagoon of the Coorong and regulating the flow of water between the lakes.

“Another major priority project would be to secure more than \$110 million to reinvigorate our Riverland irrigation industries.

“In recognition that some South Australian irrigators may wish to sell their water entitlements voluntarily, the Commonwealth is making a further \$80 million immediately available for the purchase of water entitlements from willing sellers.

“The new infrastructure works in the Riverland would be a voluntary process developed in partnership with the irrigation industry – and if taken up as an option by enough irrigators, it could transform the economy and environment in that area.

“Depending on how many people take up these options, it is estimated the project could save up to 100 gigalitres, of which 50 gigalitres would be made available for industry renewal.

“South Australia also achieved funding of up to \$100 million to remove pumps from backwaters and wetlands to the main stem of the river so that hundreds of irrigators can improve their security of supply and quality of water.

“By changing where those users access water, we could save about 50 gigalitres of River Murray water because we could cut evaporation losses and allow these wetlands to be managed more sustainably so they could fill and dry out when necessary,” Mr Rann said.

“While South Australia’s irrigation communities are the most efficient along the whole river and have been for many years, we need to position ourselves to use water smarter and do more with less.

“It is vital for all South Australians that we secure the long-term future of our communities, our water supplies and our river environment which are currently under extreme pressure due to the severe drought, on the back of decades of over-allocation.

“Community consultation to develop specific details of the industrial renewal package will be a vital part of rolling out Murray Futures across irrigation industries.”

“South Australia has lobbied hard to see an end to the over-allocation of water upstream that has so destroyed our river environment, addressed the provision of water for critical human needs, secured capacity for SA to store water in upstream storages and for an Independent Authority to manage the Murray-Darling Basin.

“Today – we have achieved a great deal for the river, for the nation and the environment,” Mr Rann said.