

Thursday, 27 March 2008

PROJECTS WILL BEGIN TO FLOW NOW HISTORIC AGREEMENT IS REACHED

Infrastructure projects to make irrigation systems and water use along the River Murray much more efficient - which will release billions of litres more water into South Australia - can begin this year.

Premier Mike Rann visited the Lower Lakes today with Federal Water Minister Penny Wong and the Minister for the River Murray Karlene Maywald following yesterday's historic agreement of the Murray Darling Basin to let people know the \$10 billion plan can begin to flow almost immediately.

"The South Australian Government intends putting together a list of water-saving infrastructure projects along South Australia's stretch of the River Murray for consideration at the next COAG meeting in Sydney on July 3.

"But importantly, the bulk of the money needs to be spent in NSW and in Victoria to make their irrigation systems far more efficient and to buy up water licences – which is all about returning billions of litres of water back into the river system that will benefit our State.

"We need to get cracking on these projects as soon as possible. The \$10 billion plan has been on the table for 15 months, waiting for Victoria to agree to it.

"Now that we have an agreement – we can accelerate the work.

"This will provide certainty for Adelaide's drinking water and for our irrigators and a better outcome for the environment.

"It has taken 100 years of bickering and over-allocations along the whole Murray Darling Basin system to bring us to this point, and it cannot be turned around overnight but at least we can begin the reforms now.

Mr Rann says that in the meantime, he is delighted that an independent authority will be established to manage the Murray Darling Basin.

"It will spend the next few years consulting with the States to develop a Basin Plan which will have final sign off by the Federal Water Minister, and be then managed by the authority whose decisions will be made on the basis of science – and not political considerations

"This will be very important in ensuring the future health of the entire river system.

"It was a point upon which South Australia remained resolute from the beginning and I am delighted this will be implemented.

"Importantly the Plan will provide for improvement environmental outcomes across the Basin and will seek to improve the status of all Ramsar sites, including the Lower Lakes, Coorong and Murray Mouth.

"We need greater flows to provide healthier wetlands, project floodplain areas and keep our magnificent River Red Gums alive," Mr Rann said.