

**MURRAY-DARLING BASIN MINISTERIAL COUNCIL  
COMMUNIQUE FROM MINISTERIAL COUNCIL MEETING 41  
29 SEPTEMBER 2006, SYDNEY**

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The Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council today expressed its serious concern about the increasingly severe ongoing drought and its likely effects on individuals, communities, irrigators and the environmental health of the Murray-Darling Basin. All Ministers' agreed to work cooperatively in the spirit of the Murray-Darling Basin Agreement 1992 to minimise the impact of the current low water resource availability on all the users of the system's water resources.

With the six months ending August 2006 being the driest in more than 100 years of record, the Ministerial Council released the September 2006 drought update (Attachment A) and noted that if there is another dry year in 2007-08, water availability might almost solely be reliant on inflows received next year.

The Council requested the Commission to continue issuing regular drought updates while the current conditions continue.

The Council noted that all Ministers have endorsed the \$156 million budget and business plan for 2006-07. This was made possible by the Australian Government's additional contribution of \$500m provided to the Murray-Darling Basin Commission and agreement by other jurisdictions to maintain their real contribution over the next five years,

Council urged the Commission to expedite programs, especially to deliver capital works for the Living Murray program and Salt Interception Schemes. In particular, Council noted that the Australian Government \$500 million will permit an acceleration of capital works at the Living Murray Icon Sites over the next five years.

The Council released a summary of the key deliverables and capital works program for the current year and the next five years (Attachment B).

The Council also noted that since April two salt interception schemes, Pyramid Creek and Bookpurnong have been commissioned and that Buronga Salt Interception Scheme is to be launched next week. Council also welcomed progress on other construction projects completed recently (Attachment C).

In relation to the Living Murray Program, the Council welcomed the approximately 35 GL of water which will be available for environmental management this year. About 25 GL of this water comes from savings made by Victoria and New South Wales in relation to the Snowy Scheme with the remainder a donation from South Australia, likely to be part of The Living Murray Program in the future.

The priority sites for using this water will be floodplain vegetation at Chowilla, Hattah Lakes, Lindsay Island and Wallpolla Island and for the fishways connecting the Lower Lakes and The Coorong.

The pool level of several weirs is also being varied below their normal levels this season to benefit river channels and wetlands without consuming water or significantly impacting upon other river users.

The Council received Victoria's proposal for recovering a further 35 GL to add to the 170GL to be delivered from Victoria's approved eligible measures.

Council also noted that the Darling Anabranch pipeline in NSW is ahead of schedule and will be completed by the end of this year – returning 47GL to the environment.

Council however expressed concern that other water recovery proposals have not progressed to the point where they can be listed on the Eligible Measures Register. Should both the May 2006 35 GL proposal from South Australia and the current 35GL proposal from Victoria be listed on the Register, a total of 310 GL out of a target of 500 GL would be approved, halfway through the five year program.

Council welcomed progress on construction activities for The Living Murray including the completion of Lock 10 fishway, Packers Crossing Regulator refurbishment, Gunbower Forest regulators, progress on resnagging stretches of river to provide fish habitat and Lindsay-Walpolla regulators.

Council approved the 2006-07 revisions of The Living Murray Environmental Watering Plan and The Living Murray Environment Management Plans for the six Icon Sites. On the issue of unregulated flows, identified by The Living Murray Independent Audit Group as the major issue facing The Living Murray, Council noted a draft report on progress and that a further report will be presented to the next Ministerial Council meeting early 2007.

Prior to the Ministerial Council meeting, the Council met with its Community Advisory Committee (CAC). It welcomed the CAC advice that the additional Australian Government contribution of \$500 million will restore community confidence in The Living Murray.

Council agreed that the Commission should publish on its website a clear exposition of the progress towards The Living Murray Initiative target showing in particular the progress of each jurisdiction and the status of their proposals to date with estimated times when water will be available.

Council also noted CAC advice that it is timely for governments to enter the water market to achieve The Living Murray objectives, subject to a number of caveats. Council agreed that the Commission should establish a Task Group to consult and collaborate on the development and implementation of market based measures for water recovery, including the purchase of water. The CAC will also be consulted in this process.

It also noted that the CAC believes it is desirable to better integrate Murray-Darling Basin Commission strategies with National Resources Management investment programs of the regional organisations within the Basin.

Council noted progress on the Risks to Shared Water Resources Program and that the Commission had agreed to publish a framework for addressing activities and processes that pose a risk to the shared water resources of the Basin. Council directed the Commission to develop a work program (for further developing the detail in the Risks Strategy) as part of the three year rolling plan for this program that includes information on future decisions and timeframes needed.

On salinity, Council noted that the Commission has endorsed Terms of Reference for the Mid Term Review of the Basin Salinity Management Strategy and that progress

on adjusting the salt registers and water trade salinity impacts has been made. Council also endorsed the construction of the Upper Darling Salt Interception Scheme near Bourke which will achieve an estimated benefit of 3.54 EC at Morgan in South Australia at a construction cost of \$4.7 million.

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*Statement ends 29 September 2006.*

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[www.mdbc.gov.au](http://www.mdbc.gov.au)

**Attachment A:** The Drought Update

Available online at:

[www.mdbc.gov.au/news/MC\\_communique/Drought\\_Update\\_September\\_2006.pdf](http://www.mdbc.gov.au/news/MC_communique/Drought_Update_September_2006.pdf)

**Attachment B:** Key deliverables of the MDBC anticipated 2006/07 & Key deliverables of the MDBC anticipated by 2011

Available online at: [http://www.mdbc.gov.au/news/MC\\_communique/Key-deliverables2.pdf](http://www.mdbc.gov.au/news/MC_communique/Key-deliverables2.pdf)

**Attachment C:** Key achievements of the MDBC July 1 2005 to September 2006

Available online at:

[http://www.mdbc.gov.au/news/MC\\_communique/Key-achievements.pdf](http://www.mdbc.gov.au/news/MC_communique/Key-achievements.pdf)