



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

MEDIA ALERT

Issued: 5 April 2004

Interim Report of the Inquiry into Rural Water Supplies presented

The House of Representatives Agriculture Committee today presented its interim report focussing on the Living Murray Initiative. The report addresses urgent issues that the Committee believes could not await the publication of its full report.

During the course of its inquiry, the Committee has received a considerable amount of evidence questioning the science underpinning the Living Murray Initiative. Concern has been expressed, both within the scientific community and the general community, that the scientific evidence presented to justify increased river flows has not been sufficiently robust. In the Committee's view the science is certainly not adequate to justify far reaching commitments to reallocate water from irrigators to the environment.

The Committee Chair, Mrs Kay Elson MP, believes that we must get the science right before making any decisions on the future of the River Murray.

"Any decision to allocate water to increased river flows will have a long term impact on rural industries and communities," Mrs Elson said. "It could also have detrimental effects upon the river itself. We owe it to the people of the Murray–Darling Basin, the vital industries they undertake, and the nation as a whole, to make the best possible choice about the allocation of water resources in the River Murray. That means collecting comprehensive data *before* making any commitment to increase river flows."

The report recommends that the Australian Government urge the Murray–Darling Basin Ministerial Council to postpone plans to commit an additional 500 gegalitres in increased river flows to the River Murray until:

- A comprehensive program of data collection and monitoring by independent scientists is completed;
- Non-flow alternatives for environmental management are considered and reported upon more thoroughly; and
- A full and comprehensive audit focussed specifically on the Murray–Darling Basin's water resources, including all new data, is conducted.

The report also recommends that the Australian Government ask the Murray–Darling Basin Ministerial Council to allocate sufficient funds out of the \$500 million allocated to the River Murray by COAG to the abovementioned tasks, prior to proceeding with the proposal to obtain increased river flows.

Mrs Elson said that only by doing the research first and making the decisions afterwards can we proceed with confidence that we are doing the right thing.

The interim report contains a dissent by the Deputy-Chair of the Committee, Mr Dick Adams MP.

The full report will be tabled mid-year.

For media comment, please contact:

Mrs Kay Elson MP, Chair, House Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Committee, on (07) 3807 6340

For background information, including the full terms of reference and copies of submissions, please contact the Committee secretariat on (02) 6277 4500 or visit the Inquiry website at www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/primind/watering/index.htm