



Government
of South Australia

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15 November 2012

The Hon Tony Windsor MP
Committee Chair
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Regional Australia
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Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

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Dear Mr Windsor

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into the House Standing Committee on Regional Australia inquiry into the *Water Amendment (Water for the Environment Special Account) Bill 2012*.

The South Australian Government supports the intent of the Bill which will provide funding for recovering an additional 450 gigalitres above the 2750 GL currently proposed in the Basin Plan. This will enable environmental outcomes consistent with the Murray Darling Basin Authority's 3200 GL with relaxed constraints model run to be achieved. In conjunction with a Basin Plan that provides the mechanism to achieve the 3200 GL water recovery amount, the Bill will provide the financial basis for returning the Murray Darling Basin to a sustainable level of health.

The South Australian Government has consistently supported a Plan based on the best available science that would restore the Murray-Darling Basin to health.

In addition to the recovery of 2750 gigalitres for the environment proposed in the draft Basin Plan, the best available science confirms that a minimum of 3200 gigalitres (i.e. recovery of a further 450 gigalitres) is needed to secure the long-term health of the river system. The science also shows that the benefits of this water will be maximised when system constraints are also addressed.

The Murray-Darling Basin Authority's work demonstrates that system constraints, such as dam outlet capacity and operating rules, are currently limiting the volume of water that can be effectively delivered to achieve environmental outcomes, particularly in the Southern connected river system.

The MDBA's modelling and subsequent scientific analysis shows that recovering 3200 gigalitres in addition to addressing constraints can deliver a number of important outcomes, including:



- an average of 2 million tonnes of salt exported through the Murray Mouth each year;
- keeping salinity below dangerous thresholds for the survival of native plants and animals in the Lower Lakes and Coorong;
- reducing the risk of the Murray Mouth needing to be dredged to remain open;
- keeping water levels in the Lower Lakes above 0.4 metres Australian Height Datum for at least 95% of the time to avoid acidification and riverbank collapse below Lock 1; and
- improved ability for floodplains to support healthy red gum forests, water bird and fish breeding and greater areas of habitat for native plants and animals.

In recognition of these significant benefits the Commonwealth Government has proposed to spend \$1.77 billion over ten years to recover the additional water and address system constraints through the introduction of the *Water Amendment (Water for the Environment Special Account) Bill 2012*.

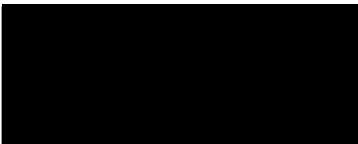
The current Murray Darling Basin reforms are a once in a lifetime opportunity to restore the Basin to health in a way that can benefit both the environment and communities. It is important that the Bill retains its flexibility to allow innovative water recovery approaches to be pursued, and not constrain future opportunities for our regional communities.

The South Australian Government notes, however, community concern as to whether the Bill provides sufficient certainty regarding the recovery of 450GL of environmental water. The South Australian Government believes that it is the Basin Plan which will ultimately provide this certainty.

However, in order to provide the community with greater confidence in the outcome, the South Australian Government recommends that the Commonwealth Parliament should consider amendments to the Bill that strengthen the Bill's intent to enable the recovery of the additional 450 GL of environmental water.

Please note I will be forwarding this submission to the Senate Environment and Communications Legislation Committee to inform its deliberations on both this Bill and the *Water Amendment (Long-Term Average Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment) Bill 2012*.

Yours sincerely



PAUL CAICA
MINISTER FOR WATER AND THE RIVER MURRAY