



MEDIA RELEASE

Senator the Hon Penny Wong

Minister for Climate Change and Water

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FIRST MEETING OF NEW MURRAY-DARLING BASIN AUTHORITY

Minister for Climate Change and Water, Senator Penny Wong, welcomed the first meeting of the Murray-Darling Basin Authority in Canberra today as a key milestone in the 92-year history of managing the water resources of Australia's food bowl.

“For the first time since Murray water began to be regulated in 1914, we now have a single agency responsible for planning for the integrated management of water resources across the whole Basin,” Senator Wong said.

“The Authority will play a crucial role in getting the Basin back on a sustainable footing as we deal with the huge challenges posed by drought, climate change, over-allocation and a legacy of neglect.”

The Authority comprises Chair Mr Mike Taylor and members Ms Dianne Davidson, Dr Diana Day, Mr David Green and Professor Barry Hart. Chief executive Mr Rob Freeman was appointed in September 2008.

The Authority absorbed the functions of the Murray-Darling Basin Commission from December last year when the Commission ceased to exist.

“The new Authority's main function is to develop a Basin Plan that will, for the first time, set a long-term sustainable limit on the use of both surface and groundwater in the Murray-Darling Basin.

“In developing the plan, the Authority will consult widely with Basin state and territory governments, key stakeholders, and rural and regional communities across the Basin.

“The scientific basis for preparing the Basin Plan includes the CSIRO Sustainable Yields project and the Sustainable Rivers Audit, which provide extensive and detailed information on every river valley in the Basin.”

Senator Wong said the independent Authority is responsible for finding the right balance between the water required to sustain irrigation communities, and the water needed to return the Basin's rivers and wetlands to health.

“The Authority members will draw on a breadth of expertise and experience in water, the environment, natural resource management and agriculture. Under Mr Taylor's leadership, they will prepare a proposed plan by 2010 for public discussion and consultation and the final plan by 2011.

“Importantly, the final decision on the Basin Plan rests with the Commonwealth Minister for Water alone.”

Photographs of Authority members in Canberra today are available at www.mdba.gov.au.