



# MEDIA RELEASE

**Senator the Hon Penny Wong**

*Minister for Climate Change and Water*

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## **LATEST MURRAY-DARLING BASIN DROUGHT UPDATE PROVIDES DISTURBING SNAPSHOT**

Today's *Murray-Darling Basin Authority Drought Update* presents another disturbing snapshot of the critical situation in the Murray-Darling Basin, confirming the need for continued action on climate change and water reform, Minister for Climate Change and Water, Senator Penny Wong, said.

"The drought update reports May inflows into the River Murray were the third driest on record at only 90 billion litres, well below the long term May average of 390 billion litres," Senator Wong said.

"The report also shows the Murray-Darling Basin has experienced its ninth consecutive autumn with below average rainfall.

"These are disturbing statistics that confirm the need to take action to tackle the impacts of climate change and help Basin communities and irrigators prepare for a future with less water.

"Our \$12.9 billion *Water for the Future* plan includes a comprehensive strategy to restore the Murray-Darling Basin to health – including \$3.7 billion already committed to specific projects nominated by the States to make irrigation infrastructure more efficient.

"We have also committed \$3.1 billion towards buying water to return to the Basin's stressed rivers and wetlands – recently announcing the biggest environmental water purchase in Australia's history of some 240 gigalitres of water entitlements from Twynam Agricultural Group."

Other measures taken by the Rudd Government to tackle the critical situation in the Murray-Darling Basin include:

- Achieving agreement with the States to establish the independent Murray-Darling Basin Authority to manage the Basin as a single entity;
- Initiating development of the new Basin Plan by 2011 that will include a new, lower, scientifically-based limit on water use in the Basin;
- A series of water purchase tenders which, including the Twynam purchase, have so far provided 297 gigalitres of water entitlements for the environment at a cost of \$380 million;
- A new \$300 million on-farm irrigation efficiency grants program;
- Funding to support the purchase of the Toorale cotton farm by New South Wales, which is returning an average of 20 gigalitres annually to the Darling River;
- A Small Block Irrigators Exit Grant program to enable small-scale, non-viable farmers to leave the industry while remaining in their homes and communities, and returning their water entitlements to rivers and wetlands;
- Inviting groups of irrigators wishing to leave the industry to submit proposals to sell their water entitlements together in ways that provide benefits for farmers and rivers.