



MEDIA RELEASE

Senator the Hon Penny Wong

Minister for Climate Change and Water

PW 297/09

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REPORT ON WATER REFORM WELCOMED

Minister for Climate Change and Water, Senator Penny Wong, today welcomed the release of the National Water Commission (NWC) 2009 Biennial Assessment.

The report is a comprehensive assessment of progress against the 2004 National Water Initiative, Australia's blueprint for water reform.

“Australia faces significant challenges in securing our water supplies, and climate change has raised the bar on water reform, making the challenges even more urgent than we thought,” Senator Wong said.

“After 12 years of inaction by the previous government, the Rudd Government has already made real progress on meeting these challenges – though we know there is still work to do.”

Senator Wong said reforming the management of our water resources was an important part of preparing Australia for a future with less water.

“We welcome the National Water Commission's assessment, released today, of progress in this reform process.”

Senator Wong said the report found that progress had been made in a number of critical areas including water trade reform and management of the Murray-Darling Basin.

“The report supports the Government's Murray-Darling Basin initiatives including the Federal Government's take-over of Basin planning, setting a scientifically-based limit on the amount of water use in the Basin, and our water purchase program.

“However, we agree with the report's assessment that there is still work to do to secure Australia's water future.

“That is why we have committed \$12.9 billion to a long-term plan, Water for the Future, that has four key priorities: taking action on climate change, securing our water supplies, using water wisely, and supporting healthy rivers.”

Programs under Water for the Future include \$5.8 billion to help make irrigation infrastructure more efficient, and \$1.5 billion to help Australian cities, towns and households secure their water supplies.

In the Murray-Darling Basin, the Government continues to work with communities to prepare for a future with less rain due to climate change.

“No government can make it rain, but this Government is enacting a three-point plan to meet the challenges in the Basin,” Senator Wong said.

“We have taken over Basin-wide planning and for the first time will place a scientifically-based cap on water use in the Basin.

“We are investing in irrigation infrastructure to help our farmers and regional communities and to protect food security.

“And we are buying back water to help restore health to our rivers.”

Senator Wong said the report would be considered by COAG over coming months.

“The NWC’s 2009 Biennial Assessment is a valuable contribution to Australia’s understanding of progress in water reform and its recommendations will be examined closely.”