



MEDIA RELEASE

Senator the Hon Penny Wong

Minister for Climate Change and Water

PW 331/09

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DROUGHT UPDATE SHOWS POOR OUTLOOK

The release of the Murray-Darling Basin Authority's latest *Drought Update* raises more concerns about the impact of climate change on the Basin's water resources, the Minister for Climate Change and Water, Senator Penny Wong said today.

Attending the Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council meeting with State Basin water ministers in Brisbane, Minister Wong said the outlook on water resources for the whole Basin remains poor.

"Research shows that this severe, extended drought is clearly linked with global warming," Senator Wong said.

"There is nowhere that this challenge is more serious than the Murray-Darling Basin.

"In the River Murray the current 2009/10 water year is tracking as the 17th driest year in 118 years of records, with stream flows and storage levels remaining low across most regions of the Murray-Darling Basin."

The *Drought Update* advises that there is a high likelihood that temperatures will be higher than average in South East Australia for the next three months – and that it is likely to be drier across the same area.

Due to recent rain in the south, Murray system inflows for the first five months of the 2009/10 water year were 2,200 gegalitres (GL) - significantly better than for the same period during each of the last three years, but well below the June to October long term average of 6,390 GL.

Water storages remain low for this time of year with Murray-Darling Basin Authority River Murray active (useable) storage at the end of October at 2,570 GL, or 30 per cent of capacity, well below the October long-term average of 6,530 GL.

Total public storage across the entire Basin also remains low, at only 28 per cent of capacity (6,450 GL compared to a capacity of 22,600 GL).

The *Drought Update* shows that while the upper tributaries of the Murray and some areas in South Australia received average, or slightly above average rainfall, the northern Basin has been particularly dry and the Darling River has stopped flowing.

The Bureau of Meteorology predicts rainfall for the next three months is fairly average for the southern Basin yet conditions will be drier than normal for the northern Basin due to an El Niño event persisting across the Pacific Ocean.

Unless there is a very significant improvement in inflows during autumn, water storages are once again expected to fall to very low levels by the start of the next water year in June 2010.

"The Rudd Government's long term, \$12.9 billion Water for the Future plan is taking decisive steps to prepare our cities and towns, our irrigators and rural communities, and importantly our rivers for a future with less water.

"The Rudd Government's water purchase and investment in infrastructure are crucial to returning the Basin to health, but nobody can hide from the fact that the Murray needs us to act on climate change."

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