



THE HON. DR MIKE KELLY AM, MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Water

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Groundwater experts meet to tackle future management challenges

The Parliamentary Secretary for Water, the Hon. Dr Mike Kelly AM MP, today opened the National Water Commission's inaugural national Groundwater Forum, which has brought together 120 of Australia's leading groundwater experts to discuss the challenges in managing the nation's groundwater and the associated reform actions agreed under the National Water Initiative.

Dr Kelly said, "Groundwater is a significant resource that is relied on by a large number of Australians. Although it makes up approximately 17% of Australia's accessible water resources, groundwater accounts for over 30% of our total water consumption.

"In recent years, prolonged drought conditions have led to the increasing use of our groundwater reserves to supplement declining surface water supplies.

"Unfortunately this is a Catch-22 situation, because as is recognised under the National Water Initiative, much of our groundwater is connected to surface water with consequent impacts on stream flows, groundwater dependent ecosystems, and water quality."

The Commission's recent report, *Australian Water Reform 2009*, found that it should be assumed that all groundwater and surface water systems are connected unless it can be demonstrated otherwise.

Dr Kelly said, "This is the basis for integrated planning and would ensure that we avoid the inevitable risks to water security that will occur if allocation decisions are made without considering the total water picture."

Dr Kelly said, "This Forum provides an important opportunity for groundwater experts and managers to discuss current issues, including the 'on ground' implications of other National Water Commission recommendations such its call for the licensing and metering of all surface and groundwater extractions."

"It is evident that the Commission's National Groundwater Action Plan, through its Australian Government investment of over \$105 million on groundwater management, is making great progress in addressing many of the knowledge gaps and management issues facing Australia's groundwater managers and practitioners".

The Forum will advance the activities funded under the National Groundwater Action Plan, which now involves 60 current groundwater projects, and provide information on the National Centre for Groundwater Research and Training.