



**MINISTER FOR NATURAL RESOURCES
MINISTER FOR PRIMARY INDUSTRIES
MINISTER FOR MINERAL RESOURCES**

MEDIA RELEASE
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NEW \$20 MILLION AID PACKAGE FOR SOUTHERN IRRIGATORS

A new assistance package worth up to \$20 million will be provided by the lemma Government to struggling southern irrigators, Natural Resources Minister Ian Macdonald said today.

Minister Macdonald said the package honoured the Government's pledge to stand by drought affected communities.

"Irrigators in the Murray and Murrumbidgee Valleys are now facing a unique and unforeseen set of environmental circumstances," he said.

"This new Extraordinary Assistance Program (EAP) will provide much needed support to irrigators adversely impacted by record low storage inflows and the worst drought in living memory," he said.

"In fact the affect of the drought is now so severe that in the month of December 2006, only 34 gegalitres were collected from inflows making that the lowest ever monthly figure.

"These irrigators are suffering from the unprecedented weather conditions and the lemma Government is standing by them.

"The EAP will provide assistance up to a \$50,000 maximum for farmers affected by the drought in sections of the Murray and Murrumbidgee Valleys."

Mr Macdonald said the package follows recent Government meetings with irrigators about their plight.

"It shows the NSW Government is listening and we are doing what we can to ease the burden of this devastating drought," he said.

"In order to access the assistance package, southern irrigators will need to demonstrate that they have applied drought mitigation strategies through the carry over of unused water from 2005/2006 in the Murray Valley or have obtained additional water in the Murray/Murrumbidgee Valleys in 2006/2007.

"It's important to note that any suspended accounts will be re-credited as soon as we receive sufficient rainfall.

"Irrigators must also be able to demonstrate a significant adverse financial impact resulting in severe financial distress, and be operating a legitimate farming business in the regulated sections of the two valleys.

"The NSW Government is working hard to come up with new ways to further enhance our drought assistance measures, however everyone knows the only thing that will solve this problem is rain, and lots of it.

"In fact we have committed nearly \$300 million in drought assistance measures thus far."

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Member for Murray-Darling Peter Black said he had worked for months on behalf of local irrigators.

“I have been pushing extremely hard for a package for irrigators hit by this drought,” he said.

“I’m pleased to see the Government taking some action.”

Mr Macdonald said while the Government was working hard to deliver real support to farming families, the Opposition was policy-bankrupt, making more than \$27 billion in unfunded promises.

“More needs to be done than calling for a state of emergency every few weeks,” he said.

“The only plan Peter Debnam and Andrew Stoner really have is a plan to cut 20,000 jobs from the public sector – a slash and burn strategy that will undermine the services that hardworking families rely on.”

The Rural Assistance Authority will be managing the assistance package and further information on the criteria and how to apply can be found at: www.dnr.nsw.gov.au or www.dpi.nsw.gov.au or by contacting your local RAA Office.

Applications close on March 9, 2007.