

Murray-Darling Basin water ministers meet in Melbourne

The Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council held its third meeting in Melbourne today.

The Council comprises the Commonwealth Minister for Water, Senator Penny Wong (Chair) and water Ministers from Queensland (Hon Stephen Robertson, represented today by the Hon Karen Struthers), New South Wales (Hon Phillip Costa), Victoria (Hon Tim Holding), South Australia (Hon Paul Caica) and the ACT (Simon Corbell, MLA).

Ministers noted the Authority's update on water resources around the Basin, including the recent floodwaters that flowed from the northern Basin, and noted that the water resource availability in the southern Basin is better than it has been since 2005.

"The rain and flooding in the northern part of the Basin earlier this year was very welcome, but Murray inflows are still tracking well below long-term averages," chair of the Ministerial Council Senator Penny Wong said.

Senator Wong said Ministers endorsed the Authority's work plan and budget for the next financial year.

On other matters Ministers:

- Approved refurbishment of the Mildura-Merbein Salt Interception Scheme at a total cost of \$16.2 million. Salt interception schemes block salt from entering the river by capturing saline groundwater through deep bores and pumping it to specially created disposal basins; and
- Reviewed and approved two additions to the register of water recovered for the environment under The Living Murray initiative.

Ministers received a report from the Chair of the Murray-Darling Basin Community Committee Ms Joan Burns on the information it has gathered from the broader Basin community on issues relating to the proposed Basin Plan.

The Authority's major task at this time is to develop the first Basin Plan for the sustainable management of the Basin's water resources, consistent with the *Water Act 2007* and the 2008 Inter-governmental Agreement between the Commonwealth, Victoria, NSW, SA, Queensland and the ACT.

A joint meeting was also conducted with Authority members after the Council meeting, where Basin water ministers received a progress update on the developing Basin Plan.

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