

Thursday, March 1, 2007

### **TEMPORARY WEIR CONCEPT DESIGN FINALISED**

Minister for Water Security Karlene Maywald announced today that the State Government has finalised the initial concept design and preliminary cost of a temporary weir near Wellington.

“This is only a concept design for the weir, it is not a final decision on construction, which will not be made until at least June,” Minister Maywald said.

“In fact, we are working closely with the Murray-Darling Basin Commission to determine just how much water South Australia may receive in 2007-08 and then whether we can push back the decisions on construction.

“Already the State Government’s move to lower the main pumping stations below Lock 1 at a cost of \$5 million has bought us a bit more time to decide on whether a temporary weir is required.

“The reality is that the Government does not want to build a temporary weir at all – but if the drought continues and we have to secure water supplies for Adelaide and our country towns, then we will.”

“It would be grossly irresponsible of any Government not to have an emergency response to secure water for Adelaide and our country towns should we endure another dry year as we have this year.

“A temporary weir is part South Australia’s disaster plan.

“A temporary weir would not impact the Lower Lakes’ levels, which are already falling rapidly – it would keep what little water we have in a smaller area so South Australia’s four major pumps can still access it.”

Minister Maywald said the weir would be a sheet-pile and granular rock embankment stretching 2.6 kilometres from Pomanda Island across to the eastern side of the river.

“This type of structure is far more complex than the original suggestion of simple sheet-piling at a narrower section of the river and the estimated cost is \$110 million.”

She said work was continuing on a detailed design and on timeframes around construction but in the next few months, work was likely to commence on some roads and ordering of sheet-pile.

“Investigations are continuing into the best method of removing the weir when it is no longer required, however it is estimated that cost of removal will be from \$10-\$25 million.

“A temporary weir is an emergency response and so the State Government has approached the Commonwealth for funding support.”

Minister Maywald said since the concept design had been finalised, important environmental impact assessment work could begin immediately.

“This environmental assessment work will be extensive and will examine both positive and negative impacts of the project between Lock 1 at Blanchetown and the weir, and the weir and the Lower Lakes.

“The State Government has also sought an exemption from the Commonwealth Government on environmental assessment and approval requirements of the EPBC Act for the construction phase only.

“This has been done because of the critical circumstances of water supply and the uncertainty about the timing of any construction and the statutory time requirements under the Act.”

Minister Maywald said the chances of actually having to operate the weir were still very low – about 5 percent.

“Operating the weir will only occur if extremely low flows continue and we are forced to secure household water supplies for our State. By then all users who rely on the Murray would not be able to use water outside their homes.”

Minister Maywald said work was still continuing on longer-term options to secure South Australia’s water supply as outlined in the Water Proofing Adelaide strategy.

This included research, planning and action to manage existing supplies, encourage responsible water use and look at additional water supplies and innovation, such as stormwater, recycled water and additional supplies, including desalination.