

Thursday, 30 August 2007

### LIBERALS 'DECEPTION' POLITICS MUDDIES A SERIOUS WATER ISSUE

Water Security Minister Karlene Maywald says that playing politics over the serious issue of managing a national drought and water shortages is creating unnecessary fear and confusion.

“It is extremely unfortunate that statements made today do not accurately reflect the reality of the negotiations that have occurred at a national level to determine water sharing arrangements as a consequence of the worst drought in recorded history.

“Today I am releasing a statement which will include the sequence of events and the supporting documentation – including correspondence between the Prime Minister and Premier Rann

“However, we welcome Malcolm Turnbull’s comments on radio this morning that: ***“the State Government is looking at increasing the size of Mt Bold Reservoir, it’s looking at desalination and so it should be, I think Adelaide has to look very seriously at augmenting its water supplies.”***

“We hope Mr Turnbull can explain the value of increasing Mt Bold Reservoir to the Liberals in South Australia who are opposed to it.

“In the meantime, I am greatly concerned that various commentators are virtually inciting people into a campaign of civil disobedience in urging people to ignore water restrictions, and completely ignoring the seriousness of the situation we currently find ourselves in because of the drought.

“I again remind all South Australians – these water restrictions were imposed by a process established, and endorsed by the Prime Minister John Howard and agreed to by all Murray Darling Premiers as a means of negotiating water allocations for each State during the worst drought this nation has ever seen.

“This is a serious situation - and for the Liberals to be using it as their play thing in the media is an act of gross irresponsibility.

“When the Prime Minister wrote to Premier Mike Rann in April 2007 he said: ***“...In addition to the potentially devastating effects on agriculture of what could be zero allocations at the start of the irrigation season ... all outside water use for domestic purposes dependent on the southern Murray-Darling Basin supplies should be prohibited from 1 July 2007.”***

“The State Government managed to negotiate a compromise to allow people to at least use watering cans in their gardens over the winter months.

“Watering cans can be used by most people unless they are elderly or disabled, in which case they can get a permit to use a hose with a trigger nozzle.

“In terms of what we can negotiate for outside use over the summer months, that will be decided by further negotiations at the national level. I have set up a working group with representatives from the garden/nursery associations to work with SA Water to look at this very issue.

“In the meantime, I suggest everyone be alert to the fact that we have a very serious water situation on our horizon – and our worst drought ever and it could get even worse yet.

“No-one wants water restrictions – and that includes Governments both State and Federal.

“But Governments can’t make it rain and neither can oppositions.

“We have to live with it for now and people should be taking a responsible attitude and realise that this is a national issue that requires everyone – including the opposition – to take every effort to conserve our precious water supplies as best we can for what could be our a very severe summer ahead,” Minister Maywald said.

## **MDB DROUGHT RESPONSE TIMELINE**

**September 2006:** The Murray-Darling Basin Commission advised all governments in the catchment that the water resources outlook was the worst on record.

**October 2006:** The SA Government established a Water Security Taskforce to analyse water availability for 2006-07 and 2007-08 and identify contingency options for consideration by Cabinet.

**October 2006:** The Water Security Advisory Group was established to review the taskforce's work and comment on the options presented.

**November 2006:** Given the basin-wide seriousness of the situation, the Prime Minister called a water summit on November 7 with Premiers and Water Ministers of New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia. It was decided to charge senior officials of each state with the task of negotiating contingency planning arrangements for providing water to cities and towns reliant on the Murray.

**December 2006 – May 2007:** The Senior Officials Group provides three reports in December, April and May. These reports have been released by the Prime Minister accompanied by a joint statement with the Premiers of New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia.

**April 2007:** The April report stated two things:

- The normal water-sharing arrangements under the Murray-Darling Basin Agreement, which governs how water is shared between the three states, should be set aside so critical human needs can be met. SA receives 141 gigalitres under this arrangement. Under the original arrangements, any water that flowed into the Murray during 2007-08 could not be used by any state.
- **Unless there were significant inflows to storages, all outside water use for domestic purposes dependent on Murray-Darling Basin supplies should be prohibited from July 1.**

**May 2007:** The May report stressed the need for more stringent urban restrictions, given the low inflows to the Murray-Darling Basin and the parlous state of MDBC storages. The report recommends:

***“Agree that, unless there are significant inflows to the storages, all outside water use for domestic purposes are dependent on southern Murray-Darling Basin supplies should be prohibited from 1 July 2007.”***

**June 2007:**

14<sup>th</sup> June - The Prime Minister writes to all Premiers recommending that all of the reports recommendations be accepted.

19<sup>th</sup> June - Premier Rann writes to the Prime Minister accepting the recommendations as called for by the Prime Minister.

Premiers of NSW and Victoria also accepted the recommendations which enable the new water sharing arrangements to come into effect.

The State Government was able to negotiate the use of watering cans and buckets only for gardeners, averting the blanket ban on watering that would have otherwise come into effect from July 1.

This minimal watering allowance for gardens was acceptable to Victoria and New South Wales.

It also ensured that SA received its share of Murray water for **critical human needs** over the border.

### **Adelaide water fast facts**

- Adelaide holds less than one year's water supply when our reservoirs are at 100 percent.
- Our backup is the River Murray – where the dams are currently at 21pc and must be shared between three states and one territory.
- Sydney dams hold about 4 years' supply – Sydney does not draw any water from the Murray-Darling Basin.
- Melbourne dams hold 3.5 years' supply. Melbourne does not draw from the Murray-Darling Basin
- All Murray-Darling Basin towns and cities, including Adelaide, are currently subject to no outside watering, except with watering cans and buckets as agreed by the States and the Commonwealth through the Prime Ministers drought contingency planning process.