

The Hon. Karlene Maywald MP



Government
of South Australia

Minister for
the River Murray

Minister for
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The Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications
and the Arts
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam

I am writing to raise concerns about amendments to the *Water Act 2007* proposed by the Water Amendment (Saving The Goulburn And Murray Rivers) Bill 2008.

The Bill proposes to amend the *Water Act 2007 (Cth)* to the effect that the Basin Plan must ensure that no water is taken from the Basin for use outside of the Basin, unless prior to 3 July 2008, water would have been taken from Basin water resources for that use.

The proposed amendments could have unintentional adverse outcomes for South Australia.

South Australia currently uses River Murray water outside the Basin for metropolitan Adelaide and communities across the State, including country towns as far west as Ceduna. This water is supplied from within the long-term diversion cap for South Australia for water taken from the River Murray. For many of these communities River Murray supply is the only available source of water and for others it is an essential component of maintaining water security, because local supplies are limited or far less reliable.

The amendments could effectively prevent not only new or additional use of water outside the Basin, but also changes in timing, manner, volume and location of supply for existing purposes. This would effectively prevent South Australia from adapting its water supply activities to meet the changing needs of its communities. It is important to recognise that over time the water needs of some communities may decrease due to other sources being brought online while the needs of other communities may increase due to population changes or the reduced reliability of local supplies in response to climate change.

For example the negative impact on local groundwater supplies on the Eyre Peninsula in South Australia arising from the prolonged dry period has meant that the Government is currently considering a combination of options to secure potable supplies to the region, including desalination and augmentation of existing pipelines from the River Murray. There are also many communities that do not have access to mains water supply, including small townships in the Adelaide Hills and some of the former "railway towns" where the State has taken over responsibility for water supplies from the Commonwealth Government. For many of these the only viable supply upgrade path would be River Murray water.

South Australia is implementing many actions to reduce our reliance on the River Murray. These include the development of alternative sources such as desalination, reuse of stormwater and wastewater and improving the efficiency of water use. We are also currently developing a State Water Security Plan to build on existing water security initiatives such as Water Proofing Adelaide and which will guide the development of regional water security plans. Despite these actions, our planning and technical investigations show that we will continue to be reliant on the River Murray as a reliable and essential component of diversified metropolitan and regional water security strategies.

The South Australian Government is concerned about the health of the River Murray and strongly supports the need to address over-allocation and use water within sustainable diversion limits. However, it also supports the need for States to retain flexibility regarding how they use water within sustainable diversion limits. In this regard the proposed amendment appears at odds with the intent of the Basin Plan, which is to set sustainable diversion limits but leave States with flexibility about how they use their available water within those limits.

South Australia's draw from the River Murray is small compared to other States. However our reliance on the River to ensure water security for communities across the State means the social and economic consequences of no longer having the flexibility to use our share of River Murray water to supply water according to the changing needs of those communities, particularly in light of climate change and increased climate variability, are enormous.

I would also like to raise concerns with respect to the proposed amendment that seeks to require that the water saved under States' water savings programs must be allocated to the Living Murray Initiative and not used for any other purpose until the objective of increasing flow to the River Murray is achieved.

Water savings programs are not defined and could be interpreted as any existing or future State sponsored water savings program involving Murray-Darling Basin water. This could cover programs that do not just apply to the Living Murray Initiative or other environment purposes but also programs where the savings are being made for water security reasons and are intended to benefit consumers or irrigators. The effect of the amendment would appear to remove all discretion from the States over how they manage the timing and mechanisms by which they achieve Living Murray targets alongside other State water efficiency or savings initiatives.

Yours sincerely

Karlene Maywald
MINISTER FOR THE RIVER MURRAY
MINISTER FOR WATER SECURITY

4 February 2009