Water for the Future Forum
Monday 2nd March 2009
Goondiwindi

Senator the Hon Penny Wong, Minister for Climate Change and Water

- Recognises how many irrigators are doing it tough, especially in the southern part of the Basin
- That is why I am announcing the acceleration of water infrastructure funding for Queensland
- $2M will be fast tracked to commence urgent projects under the Healthy Headwaters program
- Projects will include community based on farm irrigation and coal seam feasibility studies
- $900,000 will be used to help identify savings on-farm across 9 irrigation districts
- Move now to the Basin plan
- Last year, the Government secured the agreement of all states for the Basin plan
- Plan will be developed by early 2011
- Plan must take into account the socio-economic impacts for Basin communities
- Will be using the best available science to determine the environmental impacts
- Buy purchasing water, the Government are trying to strike a better balance between water for irrigation and water for the environment
- What the Government allocates for irrigation will probably be significantly lower than the amount allocated now.
- Acknowledge that the irrigation community will have concerns
- Want to reiterate that Government will only be purchasing from willing sellers, there will be no compulsory acquisition of water.
- Conscious of the importance of monitoring the impacts this will have
- Will be establishing a rigorous framework to monitor the impact
- Government remains committed to investing in irrigators
- Have committed $5.8billion through the Sustainable Water Use and Infrastructure Program
- This is more than has been invested in purchasing water
- Government remains committed to strengthening the economies of basin communities
- $3.7 billion has been committed to projects in the MDB – working with States to finalise
- Recognise importance of infrastructure on farm and water loss hot spots
- Consideration of on farm pilot projects
- $400m allocated to reduce evaporation in the Menindee Lakes

- Grants will also be available through local council for water recycling and efficiency and reuse.
- There is no quick fix
- We must meet the challenges of living with less water and restoring the river system

Geoff Penton, QMDC

- Formed in 92/93
- Independent community organisation
- Played a role in natural resource management issues
- Water important for all communities
- Watershed management
- Potential to increase agricultural production through water efficiency gains
- Regions water resources in fair shape
- Major refuge for native fish
- Barriers to fish migration ie Reillys Weir Condamine
- Water weed impacts – Chinaman's Lagoon
- Water Use Efficiency project – Calico Cottage Yuleba
- Salinity in the region – not much in stream, but significant areas of dryland salinity
- Tackling salinity with salt bush
- Soil Conservation works
- Water quality monitoring
- River health monitoring, training and working with community groups
- Example of John and Alf Turrisi of Stanthorpe – water use efficiency by having crops under plastic, improved efficiency by 70%
- Water buyback budget is $350m
- If infrastructure budget was the same we would be getting somewhere
- QMDC seeking large investment in water use efficiency
- Win-Win outcome
- Productive agriculture and improved environment
- Parallel investment needed in both

Katrina Maguire, MDBA

- Historically MDBA made up of six areas, new perspective is only one
- MDBA statutory agency under the Water Act 2007
- Comprised of Chair, CEO, four members and 250 staff
- Chair has been finalised though not yet announced, hopeful that members will be organised soon
- Role is to prepare basin plan, accredit state water plans and engage community
- There is also a Basin Community Committee with 3 sub committees of irrigation, environmental and indigenous
- There is also a Ministerial Council and Basin Officials committee
- Purpose of the basin plan is to set enforceable environmental sustainability
- Description of resources and context used

- Identify plan areas
- Identify and manage risks to water resources
- Objectives and Outcomes
- Long term average sustainable diversion limits
- Temporary diversion provisions
- Method for assessing compliance
- Environmental watering plan
- Water quality and salinity management plan
- Trade rules
- Plan focuses on economic, social and developmental principles with an interest in cultural, social and indigenous impacts
- Key challenge is how to engage stakeholders and communities
- Final plan should be completed by 2011
- Draft plan by mid 2010
- Hope to have something out in the next couple of months, but it will contain limited information on how to engage with stakeholders
- Acknowledge style of basin plan - strategic level document working in conjunction with state water resource plans

Dr Roger Stone, USQ – Cloud Seeding

- Information on discussions held in 2007
- Targeted cloud seeding can modify precipitation from individual clouds under specific local conditions
- Characteristics that respond to cloud seeding are well documented
- The extent to which it can be effective over large regions is yet to be researched.
- Two types of seeding methods – hygroscopic cloud seeding (which is better for our region) and glaciogenic cloud seeding (applied in Tasmanian and Snowy regions)
- Examples of positive results in Tasmania
- 5% increase in rainfall per year, can be up to %30 per seedable event
- What is suitable in Tasmania may not work up here
- Necessary to carry out our own work for our own regions
- Other examples of success are in the southern Murray region and the Snowy region
- Breakthroughs in literature over the last few years – scientific publications now being produced to support theories
- More recent breakthroughs include improved radar technologies, vertical slicing. Changes in cloud droplet sizes
- Other examples of apparent success include in the US (Wyoming), Mexico, South Africa and Saudi Arabia
- Would it work in this region? Outcomes in southern QLD suggest that it would make a difference
- Important case study results show possible increase in cloud droplet size, valuable increase in rain cell duration
- Works, but has to have specific methods used which are appropriate for the region in question.

David Harriss, Deputy Director General – Water Management in NSW and the National Plan

- Water use in NSW – 6,750,000 people, 940,000 hectares of irrigated land out of 65,175,000 hectares.
- Approx 1.5% of total land, but contributes 30% of return
- Reform process started in 1995
- Need to address over allocated systems
- Statutory water sharing plans
- General security and high security entitlements
- In the past, Government has said they are taking 10% of your water for the environment unless you can show exception
- Water sharing plans was the result
- Required to establish perpetual licences
- Implemented interstate trading
- 90% of water extracted in NSW now covered by water sharing plans
- NSW managing with MDB cap limits
- Major groundwater aquifers returned to sustainable yields
- NSW often seen as a pariah in the discussion
- NSW has 56% of MDB and diverts and average of 53%.
- NSW have two-tiered system of diversion, general and high security
- In dry years we don't use as much
- Water resources over allocated (both rivers and groundwater)
- Environmental health of rivers and wetlands declined
- Impact of climate change
- There will be less inflows to storages and more droughts
- Need to work with the MDBA for basin plan due in 2011
- Info on national plan for water security
- Impacts of licence buybacks on NSW
- Commonwealth funded infrastructure projects needed for NSW
- Challenges for NSW include potential for lower extraction limits through basin plan, balancing environmental needs with viable irrigation and rural communities
- Managing socio-economic issues related to buyback programmes

George Warne, CEO State Water NSW

- State Water captures, stores and releases bulk water in NSW
- Operates regulated rivers
- Not the primary natural resource management
- The past in NSW – 1900 early schemes and dreams, 30-80's dam building, 80-90's private on-farm storage, 90's environmental flows, 2000's Water Act
- Renewed focus on the Murray Darling system
- Scrutiny driven by drought, environmental changes
- State Water is a utility and primary NSW infrastructure constructing body in the MDB
- Has specific policy roles and utilises experts

- Developing technologies to improve measurement, remote sensing and efficiency projects
- Water for the Future
- Examples of projects include metering, improved accuracy, improved river operations
- Other initiatives include work on isolating, restoring and farming wetlands and forests
- Installing functioning fishways
- Stream by stream analysis
- Consultation an important part of the process
- Water buybacks a hot topic
- General security licences more appealing
- Governments are now in the market for water
- Impact on local industries and economies
- Likely trends in irrigation will include less water but demands for greater security
- Industry will adapt
- High compliance rates and costs
- Charges for water
- In the future, we must plan for climate change, groundwater use, farm dams, farm forestry, farm conservation and changed tilling practices
- Possible growing global demand for commodities (food, fuel, fibre)
- Fairness among stakeholders is vital
- Industry must adapt to new landscape

<u>Nick Xenophon – SA Senator</u>

- Don't believe you can have a credible stimulus package without mentioning those who live in the MDB
- Able to negotiate a number of measures that will be good for the entire basin
- 5 elements to the deal – 1) water buybacks, 2)$200M for local communities to plan for less water, 3) National stormwater funding, 4) small block irrigators grants package 5) independent assessment from the Productivity Commission
- Respect right of Irrigator's Council to air concerns of communities
- Don't accept rasing fears irresponsibly
- Welcome opportunity for discussion
- Buybacks must be considered in perspective
- More that unites us than divides us
- A lot of uncertainty which is killing us
- Don't see package as be all and end all but it's a start

<u>Andrew Gregson, NSW Irrigators Council</u>

- Represents 12,000 irrigation licence holders
- Membership made up of groups and water access licence holders
- First issue to address is the Commonwealth buyback program

- IC at the forefront of water as a property right
- Did not oppose the Government's purchase of water entitlements
- Level playing field and a sensibly designed program
- NSW seeks to be treated the same as other states
- VIC has in place barriers to trade and interprets barriers to own advantage
- The 4% barrier
- An annual cap on the amount leaving areas
- Over 90% of Victoria is accrued subsequent to unbundling without trade
- The 10% barrier
- A total cap (not annual) on the amount of Victorian water that can be held by non-handling entities
- This includes the Commonwealth
- Unbundling contributes to this cap as well
- VIC was precluded from the small block package until they agreed to review
- And then came Senator Xenophon
- No consultation with the industry
- Impact will be felt unfairly in NSW
- Such a drastic increase in demand MUST result in an increase in price
- Commonwealth buys less volume for the same funds
- Purchased water will offset cap reductions
- A lower purchase means a great cap reduction
- Irrigation participants will be forced out
- Industry will not necessarily agree with policy plans but we should be consulted!
- In terms of the MDBA developing an environmental plan, have been told that they are identifying environmental sites
- Not what we were sold – should be a balance!
- No one to appeal to
- Members still not announced more than 5 months after nominations due
- Still no understanding of how much water the Govt want for the environment.