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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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# Media Release

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## Howard Water Plan fine print puts Chaffey Dam upgrade at risk

The proposed upgrade to Chaffey Dam has been thrown into question by the acceptance of the Howard 10 Point Plan for the Murray Darling Basin according to Independent Member for New England Tony Windsor.

The Plan put forward last week by Prime Minister John Howard has the objective of overcoming the impediments of State borders to water reform.

“As the ‘fine print’ of the plan is coming to light, it is becoming obvious that the proposed 38 gigalitre increase in the size of Chaffey Dam could now be in jeopardy.

“With NSW set to lose its authority over water in the Murray Darling Basin, the proposed Chaffey Dam upgrade from 62 gigalitres to 100 gigalitres is now in doubt as the Prime Minister’s 10 Point Plan could prevent more water being captured,” Mr Windsor said.

Mr Windsor said that the detail of the Prime Minister’s letter to the State Premiers states that the new Commonwealth Agency would have the following functions.

- *setting a sustainable cap on extractive use of both surface and ground water within the Murray Darling Basin, based on best available science and developed in consultation with Basin jurisdictions;*
- *planning relevant to ensuring the cap is not breached at individual valley or aquifer scale, including through appropriate management of irrigation and other uses of water resources, such as farm dams, groundwater bores and plantation forestry; and*
- *as noted above, the Commonwealth would assume the management of the surface and ground water systems of the Basin*

Mr Windsor said that the Prime Minister’s letter also includes a clause relating to “interception management”.

The clause states, “*All water consumption will be subject to cap and any growth in interception will require an offsetting reduction in established use such as by transfer of entitlement, if the cap would otherwise be breached. The Basin strategic plan will have regard to water interception activities in the Basin, including farm dams, groundwater bores and reforestation. It is proposed that the States will licence the construction and operation of dams and bores and regulate new plantations in accordance with the strategic plan for the Basin.*”

Mr Windsor said that since NSW Premier Morris Iemma has indicated that he will endorse the Prime Minister’s plan, the capacity to construct additional water storage as proposed for Chaffey Dam will be very difficult to achieve.

“Mr Howard’s policy is about putting more water back into the system rather than taking it out of the system and as can be seen from the clauses in his Plan, it will go further than taking control of dam upgrades, it will even examine the impact of farm dams and plantation forestry on the Murray Darling Basin.

One ray of light in the plan that may advantage the Chaffey Dam upgrade is the re-engineering of Menindee Lakes which would ensure water savings through less evaporation.

These savings could be transferred to Chaffey Dam and still be within the Prime Minister’s Murray darling ‘cap’,” Mr Windsor said.

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