



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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MEDIA RELEASE

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Senate Inquiry opens way for study into mining impact on Liverpool Plains groundwater

The passage of two motions in the Senate should allow the Liverpool Plains groundwater and coal mining issues to be investigated by the Senate's Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee according to the Independent Member for New England Tony Windsor.

Mr Windsor believes that the motions, one introduced by Minister Penny Wong and the other by Greens Leader Bob Brown and Independent Senator Nick Xenophon, will at last open the door for the issue to become part of the Federal water debate rather than be continually sidelined to the NSW State Planning process.

He says the fact that the Senate will examine water supply and availability to address the so-called water crisis in the Coorong and the Lower Lakes of the Murray River and other related matters will allow the broader issue of groundwater to be addressed as well.

"It is known that there is a relationship between groundwater systems and river water in the Murray Darling system, hence the availability of water for any delivery process in that system.

"What is not known is the potential impact on that system of longwall mining that is currently being explored on the black soil Liverpool Plains.

What is also not known is the impact of slashing the hydraulic pressure of these interconnected systems on downstream aquifers and surface water," Mr Windsor said.

Mr Windsor believes this lack of any real knowledge and hence the poor public policy is the reason an Independent study into the impact of longwall mining on the total groundwater system is required.

"The very reason and logic for the two motions in the Senate has been based on poor public policy founded on little knowledge of those policy decisions in the past.

"Over-allocation of water licences and improper landscape management have led to the investigation for a rescue package for the Murray system.

"It is hypocritical for the Prime Minister and the Minister to blame bad past public policy for the plight of the Coorong and Lower Lakes and then allow poor planning policy to remain in terms of mining and groundwater which could exacerbate the problem they are trying to solve," Mr Windsor said.

Mr Windsor will be making a submission to the Senate Inquiry seeking the inclusion of a recommendation of the Inquiry to carry out an independent study into the impact of longwall mining on the Liverpool Plains and further downstream groundwater systems of the Namoi Valley.

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***2Minister for Climate Change and Water (Senator Wong):** To move—That the following matters be referred to the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee for urgent inquiry and report by 30 September 2008:

- (a) the urgent situation facing the Coorong and Lower Lakes, and options for both immediate and long-term responses to prevent acidification and enable sustainable management of these sites;
- (b) options and issues associated with the sourcing and delivery of water to the Coorong and Lower Lakes, including:
 - (i) the availability of water in the Murray-Darling Basin and its potential to be redirected to the Coorong and Lower Lakes, including likely transmission losses and arrangements needed to ensure effective delivery of any water,
 - (ii) any potential impacts of such redirection on communities in the basin, including Adelaide, and regional economies and communities,
 - (iii) the relevance and significance of other priority environmental needs for environmental water in the basin, including in relation to identified icon sites and other Ramsar wetlands,
 - (iv) the purchase of water on the permanent and temporary markets,
 - (v) possible financial incentive schemes to enable a one-off donation by irrigators and/or state governments,
 - (vi) any legislative or regulatory impediments to implementing available options, including the current 4 per cent limit of permanent water trade out of irrigation districts, and
 - (vii) likely availability of water into the future, including the impact of climate change on the long-term Coorong and Lower Lakes environment; and
- (c) any other related matters.

***3Senator Hanson-Young, the Leader of the Australian Greens (Senator Bob Brown) and Senators Siewert and Xenophon:** To move—

- (1) That the following matters be referred to the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee for inquiry and report no later than 30 September 2008:
 - (a) the volume of water which could be provided into the Murray-Darling system to replenish the Lower Lakes and Coorong;
 - (b) options for sourcing and delivering this water, including:
 - (i) possible incentive and compensation schemes for current water holders who participate in a once-off voluntary contribution of water to this national emergency,
 - (ii) alternative options for the acquisition of sufficient water,
 - (iii) likely transmission losses and the most efficient and effective strategies to manage the delivery of this water,
 - (iv) Commonwealth powers to obtain and deliver water and possible legislative or regulative impediments, and
 - (v) assessment of the potential contribution of bringing forward irrigation infrastructure spending under the Council of Australian Governments agreement to deliver water to save the Coorong and lower lakes;
 - (c) the impact of any water buybacks on rural and regional communities and Adelaide including compensation and structural adjustment; and
 - (d) any other related matters.
- (2) That the following matter be referred to the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee for inquiry and report no later than 4 December 2008:

The implications for the long-term sustainable management of the Murray Darling Basin system, with particular reference to:

- (a) the adequacy of current whole-of-basin governance arrangements under the Intergovernmental Agreement;
- (b) the adequacy of current arrangements in relation to the implementation of the Basin Plan and water sharing arrangements;
- (c) long-term prospects for the management of Ramsar wetlands including the supply of adequate environmental flows;
- (d) the risks to the basin posed by unregulated water interception activities and water theft;
- (e) the ability of the Commonwealth to bind state and territory governments to meet their obligations under the National Water Initiative;
- (f) the adequacy of existing state and territory water and natural resource management legislation and enforcement arrangements; and
- (g) the impacts of climate change on the likely future availability of water.