



Plan for the Murray-Darling Basin - Role of Authority Chair

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The Chair of the Murray-Darling Basin Authority, Michael Taylor AO, reported today that he had written to the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, The Hon Tony Burke MP regarding the plan for the Murray-Darling Basin, and the role of Authority Chair.

The Chair has advised the Minister that: "Since completing the Guide to the Proposed Basin Plan I have had the opportunity to engage extensively with a broad range of rural stakeholders and community groups throughout the Basin and I have listened to a wide range of advice".

Mr Taylor noted that, balancing the requirements of the Water Act 2007 against the potential social and economic impact on communities will be a significant challenge. The Guide was developed with full regard to the requirements of the Water Act, and in close consultation with the Australian Government Solicitor. However, the Authority has sought, and obtained, further confirmation that it cannot compromise the minimum level of water required to restore the system's environment on social or economic grounds.

Under the Water Act the further steps the Authority is able to take over the next 12 months in developing the Proposed Basin Plan, and the Basin Plan itself, will necessarily mirror and refine what has been done by the Authority to date. Nevertheless, the Authority will take into account the valuable feedback received from consultation on the Guide, to the extent permitted under the Water Act.

The Chair, Michael Taylor, stated that a sustainable plan for the Basin would require far more than a decision by the Authority on how much water should be transferred from human uses to the environment.

Mr Taylor said that a successful plan would require both Commonwealth and States to work together on a comprehensive range of policy, planning and implementation issues in consultation with relevant community, industry and environmental groups. While the Authority has an important part to play, it is neither empowered nor equipped to undertake the entire complex task.

According to Mr Taylor: "Discussions, planning and addressing the full gamut of environmental, economic and social issues should commence immediately. This process should not be delayed by the Authority's report on the sustainable diversion limits on water for human uses required by the final Basin Plan, due at the end of 2011".

Mr Taylor said that delay would give rise to increasing community concerns and investment uncertainty in rural and regional areas of the Basin. Moreover, it may ultimately jeopardise the successful implementation of an initiative which is vital to the long term sustainability of both the river system and the communities who contribute to the health of our nation as a whole.

It is clear that the work required over the next 12 months is extensive, and crucial to the adoption and implementation of a credible Basin Plan, capable of full implementation. While I strongly support that outcome, I believe it is time for the Government to reconsider the next phase.

In light of this overall assessment and related governance issues, Mr Taylor has advised Minister Burke that he has determined it appropriate that he leave the role of Chair of the Murray-Darling Basin Authority at the end of January, 2011.

The Chair, Michael Taylor said it had been a privilege to serve in this important role and to work with the Board members and staff of the Authority, the Basin Community Committee and Basin communities to develop and deliver the Guide to the Proposed Basin Plan.

Mr Taylor wished Minister Burke and those working on the subsequent development of the plan for the Murray-Darling Basin, and especially rural and regional communities, every success.

Michael J Taylor AO
Chair

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