



The Hon. Phillip Costa MP
Minister for Water
Minister for Rural Affairs
Minister for Regional Development

MEDIA RELEASE

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Releasing Water to the Lower Lakes Could Jeopardise NSW Supplies

State Plan Priority E1: A secure and sustainable water supply for all users

The NSW Government has said there is little scope for allocating water to South Australia's Lower Lakes during the worst drought on record and to do so could jeopardise critical water supplies for Murray Valley communities.

In August the Commonwealth announced a Senate Inquiry into water management in the Coorong and Lower Lakes to find out how much water could be provided into the Murray-Darling system to replenish the Lower Lakes and Coorong, and options for sourcing and delivering this water.

NSW Water Minister, Phillip Costa, said the NSW Government had advised the Inquiry that water resources in the NSW Murray-Darling Basin had been fully committed for critical human and industry needs and that there was limited scope for releasing water to the Lower Lakes.

"NSW water reserves have been severely depleted after seven long years of drought and what little water we have is fully committed for town water supply, stock and domestic use, to sustain critical water-dependent industries, which provide significant regional employment, and to maintain permanent horticulture plantings," Mr Costa said.

"Some creeks and streams are disconnected and we cannot provide continuous stock and domestic water supplies to affected landholders.

"NSW has already committed funds through the Murray-Darling Basin Commission to help ensure that there is no long-term, irreversible damage caused to the Lower Lakes from acidification, which is not a threat until at least next autumn."

The Minister explained that if the Lower Lakes require more water, above that required to stop acidification, there are essentially three options for making water in the NSW Murray-Darling Basin available to the Lower Lakes: releasing water from the Menindee Lakes or private storages further upstream; trading water that is already allocated; or allocating water to the Lakes in the future.

"Releasing any water from the Menindee Lakes and upstream Barwon-Darling storages for the Lower Lakes would be inappropriate as it would come at the unnecessary expense of NSW Murray-Darling communities," he said.

"Furthermore large volumes of water would be lost to evaporation during the long journey to the Lower Lakes and the mouth of the Murray in South Australia."

The Minister said that the only responsible option was for water to be purchased on the open market to replenish the Lower Lakes.

“In July this year NSW changed the rules to enable Lower Darling licensees to temporarily trade water into the Murray Valley to help make more water available to downstream industries and communities,” he said.

“I estimate that this could provide up to nine gigalitres of water that could be purchased by the Commonwealth or South Australia, which could help replenish the Lower Lakes.”

The Minister said that NSW was managing its water reserves to best meet the critical human needs of all Murray Valley communities, regardless of which side of the border they live on.

“We’ve committed 109 gigalitres of NSW water in the Menindee Lakes storages to support the delivery of water for town water supply and stock and domestic use in all Basin States, including Victoria and South Australia.”

In closing the Minister said that it was ironic that some sectors in South Australia continue to demand that NSW divert water for the Lower Lakes ahead of our high security licence holders, whilst the South Australian Government allocates water for irrigation as a priority.

ENDS

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