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Prime Minister's \$10b water plan

In January 2007, Prime Minister John Howard announced a \$10 billion national water management plan that includes a proposal for the Australian Government to assume responsibility for Australia's biggest river system, the Murray-Darling.

At the time of going to print, the Prime Minister was negotiating with the state premiers about the final details of the proposal. This is the text of the Prime Minister's foreword to his national plan for water security. The full text of this document is available online at <www.pm.gov.au/docs/national_plan_water_security.rtf>.

A national plan for water security

The drought which now grips large parts of Australia is the most severe since records began. It has taken a drastic toll on the lives and livelihoods of many Australians.

Whether in the city or in the bush, communities are understandably anxious about water, concerned about getting through our present difficulties, and worried about what the future might hold. In the face of this protracted drought and the prospect of long-term climate change we need a radical and permanent change in our water management practices.

That is why I am proposing a \$10 billion, 10-point plan to improve water efficiency and address over allocation of water in rural Australia.

The Plan includes:

1. a nationwide investment in Australia's irrigation infrastructure to line and pipe major delivery channels;
2. a nationwide program to improve on-farm irrigation technology and metering;
3. the sharing of water savings on a 50:50 basis between irrigators and the Commonwealth Government leading to greater water security and increased environmental flows;
4. addressing once and for all water over allocation in the Murray-Darling Basin;
5. a new set of governance arrangements for the Murray-Darling Basin;
6. a sustainable cap on surface and groundwater use in the Murray-Darling Basin;
7. major engineering works at key sites in the Murray-Darling Basin such as the Barmah Choke and Menindee Lakes;
8. expanding the role of the Bureau of Meteorology to provide the water data necessary for good decision making by governments and industry;
9. a Taskforce to explore future land and water development in northern Australia; and
10. completion of the restoration of the Great Artesian Basin.

Implementation of the plan will benefit millions of Australians. Its success relies on an acceptance by state and territory governments that a problem of this magnitude can only be solved if we work together as Australians.

The \$10 billion plan I have outlined will only work if the governance arrangements for the Murray-Darling Basin are placed on a proper national footing. The proposal is conditional on this occurring.

Water scarcity is a major national challenge and there will be other challenges we must confront in the years to come. However, with the resilience, adaptability and boldness Australians have shown in the past, they can be overcome.

**The Hon John Howard MP Prime Minister
25 January 2007**

