



JOINT COMMUNIQUE

The Hon Dr Mike Kelly AM MP
Australian Parliamentary Secretary for
Water

The Hon Karl Hampton MLA
Northern Territory Minister for Natural
Resources, Environment and Heritage

The Hon Paul Caica MP
South Australian Minister for the
Environment and Conservation

The Hon Stephen Robertson MP
Queensland Minister for Natural
Resources, Mines and Energy

8th Meeting of Lake Eyre Basin Ministerial Forum

Positive Future for the Lake Eyre Basin

23 April 2010

The Lake Eyre Basin (LEB) Ministerial Forum meeting in Darwin today agreed rainfall events over the past year have brought into sharp focus the truly unique nature of the Lake Eyre Basin.

It stressed the values that make the Basin so unique will continue to be protected.

Decisions from the 8th meeting will help to ensure that one of the last unregulated arid river systems in the world retains its special character.

Key decisions of the Ministerial Forum included implementing the Lake Eyre Basin Rivers Assessment which will effectively monitor the condition of the rivers and catchments in the Basin.

The Ministerial Forum agreed to commit more than \$500,000 in cash and in-kind support in 2010-11 to commence the Rivers Assessment program, which will provide sound scientific and local information to assist future management decisions about the Basin.

Additional sources of funding will also be sought to fully implement the Rivers Assessment program over the next few years, which is a key action under the LEB Five-Year Action Plan adopted by the Ministerial Forum last year.

Another priority action under the Action Plan is to enhance engagement with Aboriginal people in implementing the Lake Eyre Basin Intergovernmental Agreement, which provides the overarching policy framework under which the Ministerial Forum operates.

The Forum agreed to change the focus of this action from 'engagement with' to 'participation of' Aboriginal people. This acknowledges the need to encourage active participation of traditional owners and Aboriginal communities generally in not only monitoring the condition of the Basin but in determining appropriate management responses to issues as they arise.

The Forum also noted that implementation of the 2008-2011 Communication Plan, is making a significant contribution to understanding, relationships and management of the Basin.

A recent evaluation of the first year of the Communication Plan reported good progress towards delivering short and longer term goals and the Ministerial Forum agreed to incorporate some of the evaluation's recommendations to achieve continuing improvement in the coming year.

The Ministerial Forum welcomed \$19 million in funding provided under Caring for our Country for a project to manage feral camels in remote Australia which has the potential to impact on the future of the Basin.

This is a significant development as it brings together all relevant state and territory governments, Aboriginal organisations, Natural Resource Management boards, conservation groups, the pastoral industry, commercial interests and research organisations under a common goal of protecting identified refuges for biodiversity in northern and remote Australia under threat from camels.

Feral camels are capable of inflicting enormous damage to ecosystems, Indigenous cultural sites, remote communities and pastoral properties. Much of this damage can be unnoticed because of its remoteness.

The Ministerial Forum also acknowledged concerns raised in relation to the potential for increased demands for water and other resources in the Lake Eyre Basin to adversely impact on Basin values.

The unique characteristics of the rivers in the Basin and the on-going commitment to the objectives of the Intergovernmental Agreement were influential in the decision of the Queensland Government to extend its Wild Rivers policy to the Cooper Creek and Georgina and Diamantina Rivers.

In progressing its wild rivers process to the Lake Eyre Basin, the Queensland Government has recognised these river systems are unique, have high natural values that need to be preserved for current and future generations.

The Forum was advised that the new Cooper Creek Draft Water Resource Plan will be released at the same time as the Cooper Creek Wild River Declaration Proposal, further strengthening the alignment of water resource planning processes within the Lake Eyre Basin catchment and delivering on a key policy of the Basin's Intergovernmental Agreement.

The Ministerial Forum comprises the Australian Government Parliamentary Secretary for Water, Dr Mike Kelly (Chair); Northern Territory Minister for Natural Resources, Environment and Heritage, Karl Hampton; South Australian Minister for the Environment and Conservation, Paul Caica, and Queensland Minister for Natural Resources, Mines and Energy, Stephen Robertson.

For more information on the Lake Eyre Basin Ministerial Forum and outcomes of its 8th meeting, visit www.lebmf.gov.au

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