

# LAKE EYRE BASIN MINISTERIAL FORUM

## Communiqué

### MINISTERS SUPPORT THE FUTURE OF THE LAKE EYRE BASIN

Australian, State and Territory Water Ministers reaffirmed their governments' support for the sustainable management of the Lake Eyre Basin at the sixth meeting of the Lake Eyre Basin Ministerial Forum, held in Melbourne on 18 April 2008.

After chairing her first meeting of the Ministerial Forum, the Australian Government Minister for Climate Change and Water, Senator Penny Wong said: "I'm pleased to take on the position of Chair of the Ministerial Forum, which plays a very important role in protecting this unique Australian region. I believe the decisions we have made today will contribute to its future good management."

A key outcome of the meeting was the Ministerial Forum response to the recent Lake Eyre Basin Intergovernmental Agreement Review recommendations.

The Ministers unanimously agreed that regional Natural Resource Management groups need to be better engaged. These groups include Desert Channels Queensland, South Australian Arid Lands Natural Resources Management Board and the Northern Territory NRM Board.

"The Natural Resource Management groups were established after the Agreement commenced, so now is an opportune time to bring these groups together so they can share their unique knowledge and understanding," Queensland Minister for Natural Resources and Water, Craig Wallace said.

"This will be achieved in a number of ways including better representation on the Lake Eyre Basin Community Advisory Committee and annual meetings to discuss whole-of-Basin issues."

A five-year action plan for the Lake Eyre Basin will also be developed, with clear responsibilities and reporting arrangements specified.

"A lot of work has already been done by regional groups and jurisdictions in identifying priorities. This plan will refine that work and outline key priority actions to be undertaken over the next five years," Northern Territory Minister for Natural Resources, Environment and Heritage, Mr Kiely said.

The Ministers released the *State of the Basin 2008: Rivers Assessment* report which was prepared by the Lake Eyre Basin Scientific Advisory Panel.

"The State of the Basin report shows that the rivers and catchments of the Lake Eyre Basin are considered to be in good health," Senator Wong said.

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“This makes the Basin unique when compared with other arid river system in Australia, and the Basin may be a critical habitat when the health of other river systems is in decline.”

“However, the report notes that threats such as inappropriate water developments and pest incursions could have severe impacts on the Basin ecosystem health.”

The Ministers also released the ARIDFLO Scientific Report – a substantial body of work that will benefit all those working, living and visiting the Lake Eyre Basin.

“Historically there has been limited information on Arid Zone ecosystems in Australia and the report provides essential knowledge into the ecology and hydrology of such systems, particularly in the Lake Eyre Basin,” South Australian Minister for the Environment and Conservation, Gail Gago said.

All Ministers thanked the outgoing members of the Lake Eyre Basin committees for their service, noting with particular sadness the death of former Scientific Advisory Panel Chair, Professor Peter Cullen, who made a significant contribution to the Panel.

A number of new members were approved to the Lake Eyre Basin committees, including increased Aboriginal representation on the Lake Eyre Basin Community Advisory Committee. Professor Stuart Bunn was appointed as the new Chair of the Scientific Advisory Panel.

Covering one-sixth of Australia, the Lake Eyre Basin is one of the world’s last unregulated dryland river systems and supports a range of nationally important natural, social and economic values.

The Ministerial Forum was established under the Lake Eyre Basin Intergovernmental Agreement, signed by the Australian Government, Queensland, South Australian and Northern Territory governments. The agreement came into effect in June 2001 and provides for the sustainable management of water and related natural resources within the Lake Eyre Agreement area.

The Ministerial Forum comprises the Australian Government Minister for Climate Change and Water, Senator Penny Wong (Chair); the Hon Leonard Kiely MLA, Minister for Natural Resources, Environment and Heritage (Northern Territory); the Hon Gail Gago, MLC, Minister for the Environment and Conservation (South Australia) and Mr Craig Wallace, Minister for Natural Resources and Water (Queensland).

For more information on the Lake Eyre Basin Ministerial Forum including the response to the recommendations of Lake Eyre Basin Intergovernmental Agreement Review visit [www.lebmf.gov.au](http://www.lebmf.gov.au).