



PRIME MINISTER

PRESS STATEMENT NO. 60

2 March 1973

RIVER MURRAY COMMISSION

The Prime Minister announced today that at the request of the Premier of South Australia a meeting had been held between the Premiers of New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia and himself concerning the River Murray, the existing powers of the River Murray Commission and the problems which had arisen in ensuring water quality in the River Murray. The meeting was also attended by the Hon. Moss Cass, M.P., Australian Minister for the Environment and Conservation, the Hon. G.F. Freudenstein, M.L.A., the New South Wales Minister for Conservation, the Hon. Roberts Dunstan, M.L.A., the Victorian Minister of Water Supply, the Hon. J.D. Corcoran, M.H.A., the South Australian Minister of Works.

The Prime Minister said that the original River Murray Waters Agreement had been signed in 1914 and at that time the major factor in interstate disputes had been navigation and quantities of water shared between the States. Although quite a number of amendments had been made to the Agreement since that time it had become apparent that a 1973 model was now necessary because of the vast changes in circumstances which had occurred since the original Agreement was signed.

Increased use of the River's available water resources has led to more complex problems involving not only the availability of water but the quality of water in the river. Problems include increasing salinity, pollution by pesticides, weedicides and fertilizers; also the need to prevent pollution from new and growing urban areas (e.g. Albury/Wodonga and Monarto).

The meeting agreed to establish a working party of senior officials of the Australian and State Governments concerned with the following terms of reference :

1. Examine and recommend in an initial report urgent interim measures which might be implemented in the short term to deal with the salinity problems of the River Murray waters and the means by which those measures might be financed and operated.
2. Examine and recommend types of measures which need to be taken to protect and where necessary improve the quality of the River Murray waters in respect of (a) long term salinity control, and (b) other forms of water pollution.
3. Examine and recommend changes which would be required in the River Murray Waters Agreement to enable the River Murray Commission to undertake the measures referred to in 2.
4. Enquire into and report on other matters referred to it by the Steering Committee.
5. Membership of the Working Party shall comprise one official each from the Australian Government and the State Governments. The Australian Government will provide the Secretariat.
6. The Working Party is empowered to create sub-Committees and to co-opt as necessary to fulfill the above Terms of Reference.
7. An initial report is to be made by the Working Party to the Steering Committee within six months.
The Steering Committee shall comprise the following Ministers:

The Australian Minister for the Environment
and Conservation,

The New South Wales Minister for Conservation,

The Victorian Minister of Water Supply,

The South Australian Minister of Works.