



12

PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

SUNDAY, 18 OCTOBER 1981

ELECTORATE TALK

The River Murray is Australia's most important water resource, and effective and appropriate management is vital to the future of the Murray. Everyone agrees that the Murray must be safeguarded against deterioration, but the different concerns of those people and groups who have an interest in the Murray mean that a balance must be struck between a variety of considerations. The Commonwealth Government, together with the state governments affected, has been determined to achieve harmony and effectiveness in making arrangements for the management of the Murray, and the new River Murray Waters Agreement is a significant milestone in the continuing development and management of the Murray.

The quality of the water in the Murray has become a critical issue, especially in South Australia, and the difficulty of maintaining a high quality has for some years been giving cause for concern. The Commonwealth has been taking significant action over recent years in connection with the environment and the economy of the Murray, especially through its contributions to the construction of the Dartmouth Dam, which is now about two-thirds full. The vastly increased fresh water source which this dam places under the control of the River Murray Commission will enable the Commission to advance many important river management objectives, including significant control of river salinity.

The Commonwealth has also been providing funds over the past three years for salinity control projects in the Murray Valley, and some \$6 million will be provided this year for this purpose. The highest priority projects recommended in the most recent report on the Murray, the Maunsell Report of 1979, are now well in progress, and the Commonwealth intends to proceed with additional projects concerned with the other priorities identified by that Report.

The Commonwealth has also introduced taxation concessions to encourage the improvement of irrigation practices because poor irrigation practices are a major factor in salinity problems. In addition, the Commonwealth is continuing to assist South Australia improve the quality of the river water supplies for urban purposes, and by the end of this financial year over \$40 million will have been provided towards a filtration scheme for Adelaide's water supplies.

The new River Murray Waters Agreement pays particular attention to water quality in the river, and gives the River Murray Commission the right to assess the implications for water quality of new developments, and the right to make representations on proposals which otherwise might be harmful to water quality. Former River Murray agreements have worked to the advantage of all three states for some 60 years, and the revision in the new Agreement to meet today's requirements is an important step towards improving water quality in the Murray.

A draft of the new Agreement has been before the governments concerned for a considerable time, and I am delighted that we achieved acceptance of the new Agreement at our joint meeting last Friday, and delighted also at the degree of co-operation which this achievement represents. The Murray River system is a mighty resource which belongs neither to any one state nor to the Commonwealth, and we owe it not only to ourselves but also to our children to make sure that the Murray system and its water are maintained at the highest standards.

It is a vital concern for all the people who live along the Murray and make their livelihood as a result of the resource, whether they are in New South Wales, Victoria or South Australia. This is important for many thousands of farms in all three states but it is also important for people who live in metropolitan areas and in the city of Adelaide.

---oOo---