



PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

19 AUGUST 1985

JOINT STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE PREMIER OF NSW,
THE PREMIER OF VICTORIA, AND THE PREMIER OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Ministers from the Commonwealth, New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia will meet in Adelaide in November to consider more effective ways of managing the Murray River and its Basin.

In announcing the historic meeting today, the Prime Minister and the Premiers of the three States said there was serious concern about water and land salinity in the Murray Basin. Although water and land management is primarily the responsibility of individual States, significant advances can be achieved through inter-governmental collaboration in dealing with the complex water and land-related management problems in the Basin.

The complex interaction between water and land management underlines the need for more active involvement of all government agencies with significant interests in these matters - agriculture, water resources, soil conservation, environmental protection - in any new collaborative inter-governmental approach to natural resource management in the Murray Basin.

This is imperative if increased emphasis is to be given to treating the causes of water and land degradation - originating mainly in past and current management practices - rather than the symptoms of the problem, as has tended to be the case to date.

To provide a sound basis for consideration by the four Governments of options for more effective collaboration in Murray Basin management, it has been agreed that the meeting will involve all Ministers of the four Governments with responsibilities relating to water, agriculture, soil conservation and environment protection.

The initiative for such a high level meeting, designed to consider the complex issues involved and develop recommendations for action by the respective Governments, came in first instance from the South Australian Premier,

Mr Bannon, and the Victorian Premier, Mr Cain, and was readily agreed to by the other Governments involved.

The meeting, in which the Commonwealth will play a co-ordinating role, will be preceded by preparatory work undertaken by officials of the four Governments. Representatives of local and other interest groups will be invited to attend the meeting as observers.

The Murray Basin contains the nation's most important water resource, providing assured water supplies to 80% of all irrigation in Australia. It includes some of our best cropping and animal production country.

The long-term future of this region is of considerable national significance, and the outcome of the forthcoming ministerial meeting will be an important contribution to whatever further action is considered necessary to achieve sustainable utilisation of the natural resources of the region and to secure its economic future.