

LAKE EYRE BASIN MINISTERIAL FORUM COMMUNIQUÉ

March 2007

The Lake Eyre Basin Ministerial Forum has met for the fifth time (out of session) and has agreed to key initiatives in the Basin in 2006-07. The Ministerial Forum was established under the Lake Eyre Basin Intergovernmental Agreement, signed by the Australian, Queensland and South Australian Governments in 2000 and the Northern Territory in 2004. The Agreement provides for the sustainable management of water and related natural resources within the Lake Eyre Basin Agreement area.

“The Lake Eyre Basin reflects Australia’s extraordinary geological, environmental and cultural heritage. It covers more than a million square kilometres, which is almost 17 per cent of Australia and contains artesian springs estimated to be 700,000 years old,” the new Chairman of the Ministerial Forum, Malcolm Turnbull, said.

The Ministerial Forum comprises the Australian Government Minister for the Environment and Heritage, (Chairman); Ms Marion Scrymgour, 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, MP Minister for Natural Resources and Water (Queensland).

At its last meeting, under the Chairmanship of Senator, the Hon Ian Campbell, the Ministerial Forum agreed to the expansion of the area covered by the Lake Eyre Basin Agreement, providing a more effective mechanism to address natural resource management issues such as the spread of weeds and feral animals across the whole of the basin.

Ministers also recognised the contribution being made by members of the Ministerial Forum’s Community Advisory Committee and Scientific Advisory Panel.

“The Community Advisory Committee and Scientific Advisory Panel are playing a vital role in supporting the implementation of the Agreement. These two groups played a key role in progressing the Lake Eyre Basin Rivers Assessment in 2005-06,” Minister Turnbull said.

The Rivers Assessment project is examining the condition of the catchment including its rivers, floodplains, and wetlands and is a key project being undertaken in 2006-07.

The Ministerial Forum agreed to an extra \$420,000 for the Lake Eyre Basin Rivers Assessment project in addition to the \$250,000 already contributed from 2004-06. The funding will result in piloting of waterbird breeding assessment measures and completion of an initial State of the Basin report in 2007.

Other key outcomes from the meeting included:

- Completion of the *Hydrology of the Lake Eyre Basin* report providing comprehensive research on the climate and rainfall of the Basin to help protect the catchment.
- Agreement to almost \$1 million of funding for projects under the Lake Eyre Basin Agreement in 2006-07.
- The success of the 2006 Lake Eyre Basin Conference.
- Progress with the review of the Lake Eyre Basin Intergovernmental Agreement.
- Co-operative cross border consultation in the development of a water resource plan for the Queensland component of the Georgina and Diamantina Rivers.

The Ministerial Forum also noted that in 2006-7 approximately \$4.8 million will be spent to protect and sustainably manage the Lake Eyre Basin through the Australian Government's Natural Heritage Trust and National Action Plan on Salinity and Water Quality. With cash and in-kind contributions from NT, Qld and SA, it brings total spending in the Lake Eyre Basin Agreement area to around \$9.6 million.

The Basin is one of the world's largest closed water systems with its waters ending in Lake Eyre, 16 metres below sea level. "The Lake Eyre Basin Intergovernmental Agreement demonstrates a successful partnership between the South Australian, Northern Territory, Queensland and Australian Governments to manage one of Australia's largest and most intact river catchments," Mr Turnbull said.

Further Information:

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Attachment: Expanded Lake Eyre Basin Agreement area.

Annexure A to Schedule 3:
THE LAKE EYRE BASIN AGREEMENT AREA

