

2 February 2009

WHERE'S THE AUTHORITY?

The National Irrigators' Council has called on Commonwealth Water Minister Senator Penny Wong and her State colleagues to announce the appointment of the members of the Murray Darling Basin Authority without further delay.

The Authority was established under the Water Act 2007 to prepare and administer the Basin Plan for water resources in the Murray Darling Basin. Applications for the four Members and Chairman closed last year.

Council Acting Chief Executive Officer Andrew Gregson says Basin communities and irrigators in particular should be disturbed by the delay and its consequences.

“The Murray Darling Basin Authority has been in place since December. Under the guidance of CEO Rob Freeman, significant work has been undertaken in structuring how the Basin Plan will be developed – all without the oversight of the five other Members of the Authority.

“With Governments delaying the appointments, Mr Freeman is being forced to make decisions that will have a profound impact on those that rely on the Murray Darling Basin without high level counsel.

“Basin communities supported the establishment of the MDBA in part because of the structure – 4 Members and a Chairman to oversee the activities of the Authority. We certainly didn't sign up to what is currently happening.”

Mr Gregson also noted that the primary community input to the process – the Basin Community Committee – has not been appointed.

“The Authority Members have a role to play in selecting the Community Committee, so clearly that process cannot commence until the Members are appointed – yet the structure of how the Plan will be written is well advanced without any community input.”