



Media Release – 16th August 2010

Water Reform Fails South Australia

The former Senior Adviser on Water to the United Nations and international critic of water market reforms Maude Barlow said that both "Labor and Coalition parties have so far failed to propose solutions to address the continuing emergency in South Australia's River Murray.

"The entire Murray-Darling basin, its rivers, tributaries, wetlands, communities, towns, cities and economies that it supports, will not survive the pressures that have been placed on its water resources by decades of mismanagement and the creation of water markets," said Ms Barlow.

Ms Barlow said she was motivated to comment having witnessed first hand the disastrous state of Lake Albert, Lake Alexandrina, Coorong and Murray Mouth during a visit to South Australia in 2009.

"Sixteen years of water reform has failed to deliver a fair and reasonable share of the waters of the Murray-Darling Basin to South Australia. The water reform policies of both State and Federal Governments has been about privatising water itself rather than conservation." she said.

Maude Barlow is the International Patron of the Water Action Coalition (WAC). WAC is a diverse and broadly represented group of concerned South Australians that is challenging Commonwealth and State water policies.

WAC recently presented its views to a Senate Inquiry, arguing that nothing short of a full public inquiry, with the powers of a Royal Commission, could unravel decades of bad policy, gross mismanagement and ongoing exploitation of the waters of the Murray-Darling Basin.

Maude Barlow says she supports the need for a Royal Commission as the actions of politicians have failed to uphold the constitutional obligation of Parliament to retain public ownership of all waters.

The convenor of WAC John Caldecott says that "International investors have been allowed to buy water rights that the founding fathers of the Australian Constitution made clear were the common property of Australia. What is happening, and it has been happening by stealth over a number of decades is outrageous and undemocratic."

The fundamental right that water in the rivers of Australia be held in public trust, which is enshrined in the Australian Constitution and supported by Common Law is being ignored by the States and the Commonwealth.

"South Australians are being dispossessed of their fundamental right to water under the Australian Constitution. All political parties must respect this right and develop solutions that honour the constitution," he said.

"We have seen nothing from the two major parties that give us any confidence that the Nation's water resources will be protected from international and greedy market profiteers or the recognition that water is the connecting element that sustains all life in this country," he said.

"By not releasing the draft Basin Plan before going to the polls the incoming Government will have no mandate to implement its recommendations," he said.

In its submission, WAC argues that the crisis in the River Murray should have been fixed by the Commonwealth a long time ago by using its executive powers to establish a State of Emergency. A key objective would be to conserve and prioritise water use to meet Australian needs first and foremost.

"The next Australian Government must act to establish a State of Emergency without delay," he said.

References :

WAC Senate Inquiry Speech Notes, Parliament House Canberra, 30th June 2010.

WAC Opinion: Water Reform Fails South Australia Maude Barlow & John Caldecott, 16th August 2010

Information Contacts :

Media Coordinator: Richard Watson - Mobile: 0402 418 191 richard@thinkstrat.com

WAC Convener: John Caldecott - Mobile: 0427 976 503 jec@ciq.com.au

International Patron: Maude Barlow - mbarlow8965@rogers.com

Water Action Coalition: <http://civictrust.net.au/page19.htm>