

Senator the Hon Penny Wong

Minister for Climate Change and Water

Speech to the South Australian Press Club

Monday 9 November 2009

Check against delivery

Introduction

- Acknowledgements

The Murray Cod is the fiercest predator in the Murray.

It's renowned for eating anything it can fit in its mouth – ducks, cormorants, tortoises, snakes, and small mammals have all been found in their bellies.

Even small dogs, if you believe anglers' stories.

The largest on record was an incredible 1.8 metres long and 113 kilograms, but according to legend even bigger ones existed.

Around 1920 the monster reported lurking in Lake Hawthorn, Mildura, was dubbed the 'croco-gater' by the local paper.

In 1883, more than 147 tons of Murray cod were sent to market from the Murray town of Echuca alone.

Last week, the Murray Cod was added to the International Union for the Conservation of Nature's global red list of endangered species.

The Murray Cod is yet another symbol of how badly the Murray Darling Basin has been let down – over decades of mismanagement, compounded by the onset of climate change.

Reform: changing how we use our rivers

After decades of political irresponsibility, we are turning this ship around. We have come a long way in a short time in reforming the Basin – in changing how we use our rivers.

Fewer than six months after the election, we secured the agreement that had eluded all who had tried previously.

The agreement struck here in Adelaide between the Prime Minister and the Premiers means that the States no longer control the destiny of the Murray.

The way we manage the long term future of the Murray Darling Basin has changed forever.

We have taken over Basin-wide planning and will put a new, lower, scientifically-based limit on water use in the Basin, for the first time ever.

We have set up an independent authority to develop this first-ever Basin Plan, with the draft Plan due out next year.

After this historic takeover, there were still further details that needed resolution.

For example, there are a number of factors that have complicated water trade, including antiquated barriers to trade in some States. If we want to truly value water, and we want access to be fair, we need water to be able to move to where it is most highly valued – which is why we need a flexible, efficient and effective water market.

