



NATIONAL TRUST

MEDIA RELEASE

Murray Darling Basin pleads for relief

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The Australian Council of National Trusts has identified the Murray Darling Basin as a 'region at risk' that requires urgent action.

The Murray Darling Basin comprises 14% of Australia's land area and accounts for 34% of Australia's crop production. It has at least 35 endangered birds with 16 endangered mammals (20 mammal species already being extinct).

Only 10% of the pre European fish populations of the river remain today. 95% of the Murray River is in a degraded state primarily due to over allocation of water for irrigation. This includes the internationally significant Lower Lakes and Coorong near the Murray mouth, where lack of flows and excessive salt levels are endangering plant and animal populations.

Patrick Comben, Chairman of the Australian Council of National Trusts, says that immediate action is necessary.

"In order to return the system to health, 1500 gigalitres of water must be added to the present environmental flows", Comben said. "This means significant quantities of water must be bought to reduce the amount of diverted water."

The new Commonwealth *Water Act 2007*, the new Murray Darling Basin Authority and a basin wide plan are a step in the right direction but the failure of all States and Territories to agree has competing interests obstructing good decision making.

"The challenge for implementing an effective management regime for the rivers is one of the greatest tests of our national maturity", Comben said. "It requires a high level of technical skill but more importantly idealism and vision which values the common good over sectional interests."

The National Trust implores that parliamentarians at the State and National level show leadership and for the general public to make it clear they support the rehabilitation of the Murray Darling Basin."

For more information please call Patrick Comben on (02) 6642 4122