

## Media Release

20 September 2007



ABN 22 093 134 037

### Government Supports Irrigators in Murray Darling Basin Crisis

The Murray Darling Basin Crisis Taskforce met again this week with the Federal Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries & Forestry, Peter McGauran, his senior officials and officials from Centrelink, as part of ongoing discussions over the looming crisis in the southern Murray Darling Basin (MDB).

The industry delegation was led by Horticulture Australia Council (HAC), the peak national association representing the horticultural industries, and included representatives from all regions of the Basin, and the major industries at risk. The region produces 41% of the nation's agricultural output - and includes more than 138,000 hectares of permanent horticultural plantings, which produces over 60% of the nation's fruit, as well as significant vegetables, dairy and rice.

On 1 July, for the first time ever, allocations for irrigators in the southern MDB were severely cut to either zero or minimal amounts. Current signs for the survival of these crops (and particularly permanent plantings) are grim. With the exception of the MIA, much of the Basin is expected to die before the end of the year.

The economic and social consequences of this to the growers, and the thriving communities which rely upon them, are potentially staggering for regional Australia.

Minister McGauran assured the delegation that the Government is fully aware of the scope and extent of this widespread disaster, and will offer assistance to irrigators in these unprecedented circumstances.

"The Minister foreshadowed welcome changes to the Exceptional Circumstances program which will make EC more accessible to intensive irrigated industries, and assist in supporting farming families, affected small businesses, and their communities, through this crisis and the subsequent recovery process.", said Stuart Swaddling, HAC Chair.

"In the case of permanent plantings, this is a long-term process; it can take 5-10 years after replanting to produce a commercial crop which again brings in an income.

"The Minister also assured us that the Government was considering a longer-term Recovery Package for irrigators in the Basin, to be announced in the near future. We will continue to work closely with Government on the detail of the assistance package, to ensure regions and industries involved are able to replant and re-build on a sustainable basis into the future.", Mr Swaddling said.

Contact: **Stuart Swaddling, HAC Chair, ph (02) 9679 4000; or  
Kris Newton, CEO, (02) 6273 9600; 0439 960040**

Level 2, NFF House  
14-16 Brisbane Ave  
BARTON ACT 2600

PO BOX 3700  
MANUKA ACT 2603

**T:** (02) 6273 9600  
**F:** (02) 6273 0157

admin@hac.org.au  
www.hac.org.au

#### Members of HAC include:

Agricultural Investment  
Managers Australia

Apple & Pear Australia Ltd

Avocados Australia Ltd

Australian Banana  
Growers' Council

Australian Citrus Growers  
Inc

Australian Custard Apple  
Growers

Australian Dried Fruits  
Association

Australian Mushroom  
Growers Association Ltd

Australian Nut Industry  
Council

Australian Passionfruit  
Industry Association Inc

AUSVEG

Cherry Growers of  
Australia Inc

Growcom

Growcom Pineapples

NSW Farmers Association

Nursery & Garden Industry  
Australia Ltd

Strawberries Australia Ltd

Summerfruit Australia Ltd

Turf Producers Australia Ltd

#### New Members:

Persimmon Industry  
Association Inc



Horticulture Australia  
Council appreciates  
the sponsorship of  
Prime Super