



**MEDIA RELEASE**

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## **Environmentalists urge speedy return of water to rivers and wetlands with passing of Water Act**

The *Water Act* passed by Federal Parliament today is a first step towards dealing with the water crisis in the Murray Darling Basin but must be followed by the urgent return of water to the river system, the Australian Conservation Foundation and the Inland Rivers Network said.

A key feature of the Act is the requirement that the Government give effect to a number of international commitments for wetlands and wildlife that require it to actively protect wetlands and deliver urgently needed environmental flows.

"The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance was signed more than 30 years ago, however to date the Federal Government – as the signatory to the Convention – has failed to fulfil most of its obligations," said Amy Hankinson of the Inland Rivers Network.

"Unfortunately the legislation does not establish an independent Authority, a key omission that would otherwise have taken national water management beyond the politics that have hampered it for years," she said.

There are a number of other gaps, with the Act lacking:

- Legal provisions to deal with interception activities and floodplain extraction
- Explicit provisions to protect environmental water from theft
- Timelines and milestones to ensure environment water targets are met
- Checks and balances to provide a robust sustainable diversion limit
- Public standing provisions to hold governments accountable.

"While the *Water Act* provides a foundation for management it does not put a drop of water back into the Murray River or our precious wetlands.

"What is needed now to fix the water crisis is significant upfront spending and targets and timelines in order to realise the vision of the National Plan on Water Security, as articulated by the Prime Minister in January."

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