

Media Release

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**Nature Conservation Council of NSW
Environment Victoria
Inland Rivers Network
Conservation Council of South Australia
Australian Conservation Foundation**

Dying Red Gums Demand Action

Environment groups have called on state and federal Ministers to declare a river emergency and agree on emergency measures to save the Murray's red gums and floodplains.

In advance of Friday's Murray Darling Basin Ministerial Council meeting, a coalition of environment groups said the Prime Minister and Premiers should meet by Christmas, as a matter of urgency, to resolve the stand-off over funding for the National Water Initiative and deal immediately with the desperate plight of the Murray.

A recent shocking report indicates that the percentage of stressed and dying red gums, along one thousand kilometres of the Murray, has increased from 51% to 75% over the last 18 months, which is an increase of nearly 50%.

Environment Victoria's Executive Director Marcus Godinho said the Murray Darling Basin Commission's three-government report on the health of the river red gums demonstrated the urgency of this problem.

"The Murray is Australia's most important river - and it is on its last legs. State and Commonwealth Governments must use their powers to immediately recover water for the Murray. Although the National Water Initiative is important in the long-term, differences between the states and the federal government over funding should not prevent a rescue mission," he continued.

ACF Executive Director Don Henry said "Australia needs a concerted, national approach to water management with a timeframe for restoring stressed rivers to health and protecting rivers of high conservation value as well as providing business certainty. The states and federal governments should resolve their differences over funding for the National Water Initiative and turn these objectives into reality."

Simon Divecha from Conservation Council of SA said "the Murray is crucial for our economic and environmental future. At the Murray's end, we have been first to see these economic consequences."

Brendan Fletcher from the Inland Rivers Network continued "The Living Murray Initiative and the National Water Initiative are both vital to returning the Murray to health. The Ministers

should sign off on the Living Murray Business Plan as a sign of intent and good will, and then move immediately toward getting the National Water Initiative back on track."

In November 2003 the State and Commonwealth governments committed to giving the Murray 500 billion litres within five years. So far no water has been returned to the Murray.

Media Contacts:

Don Henry, Executive Director, ACF: 0418 501 395

Dr Paul Sinclair, Director Healthy Rivers Campaign EV: 0417 017 844

Simon Divecha, CEO Conservation Council SA: 0417 879 439

Brendan Fletcher, Coordinator, Inland Rivers Network: 0407 279 088