



TRANSCRIPT

Senator the Hon Penny Wong

Minister for Climate Change and Water

PW 77/09

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TRANSCRIPT OF JOINT DOORSTOP INTERVIEW WITH SENATOR NICK XENOPHON AND SOUTH AUSTRALIAN MINISTER FOR WATER SECURITY AND THE RIVER MURRAY, KARLENE MAYWALD, ADELAIDE

SUBJECT: MURRAY-DARLING BASIN, WATER FOR THE FUTURE, STORMWATER HARVESTING

E & O E – PROOF ONLY

WONG: Thanks very much for coming.

It's great to be here today with Senator Nick Xenophon, with Minister Maywald, Tony Zappia and a range of other MP's to launch this \$200 million initiative.

This is all about recognising the need to secure our long-term water supplies. The Rudd Government's committed 12.9 billion to our Water for the Future package and today I'm announcing a \$200 million initiative for stormwater funding.

And this is all about adapting to climate change. It's securing our long-term water supplies in the face of a changing climate and less rain. Because climate change means we are going to have to look to innovative and new water supplies and we are putting up \$200 million of Federal Government funding to get additional investment in stormwater here in Adelaide and in other places around the nation.

Can I thank Senator Xenophon for his constructive approach to negotiations on this issue. The funding announced today is a direct result of the negotiations in which he engaged in with the Federal Government. And I also want to acknowledge the continued work of the South Australian Government and the South Australian Minister on these issues.

Happy to take questions.

JOURNALIST: Is this the beginning of a series of stormwater proposals and stormwater offers from the Federal Government? I mean in terms of \$13 billion, \$200 million doesn't seem like a hell of a big sum.

WONG: Well we have to look at a whole range of strategies to secure our water supplies. And let's remember the \$12.9 billion includes a very substantial investment in purchasing entitlement for the river to improve the health of the Murray River and other tributaries and rivers in the Murray-Darling. So we have a very substantial investment.

This is a very significant investment in stormwater and I think to date we had invested already some \$100 million in stormwater throughout the nation, this is an additional \$200 million secured and guaranteed to be applied to stormwater.

What is also important about the design of this initiative is that we have consciously, as a result of the discussions with Senator Xenophon ensured that smaller applications, smaller projects can be considered. And what this does... [birds chirping]

XENOPHON: The birds are happy.

WONG: The birds are happy. What this does is it ensures that smaller projects, community driven projects, local government driven projects, are able to apply for this funding. So we've lowered the size of the projects so we can expand on the number of projects recognising that many local communities want to do the right thing.

JOURNALIST: Are you likely to expand on the \$200 million in the future?

WONG: Well look, we've just announced the \$200 million dollars. It's a very substantial investment in stormwater for South Australia and for the nation.

JOURNALIST: This project cost \$38 million alone. Obviously... it's not a cheap supply for water – \$200 million across the nation – it just doesn't seem very much.

WONG: Can I just remind everybody there are a whole range of programs in place that are all about recognising that we face the challenge of climate change and we face less rain... the reality of less rain in the southern part of Australia. So we have a range of projects in place and they include 5.8 billion dollars to invest in irrigation infrastructure to improve efficiencies to return water to the river, 3.1 billion for purchases of entitlements also to reduce how much we take out of the river to improve health of the Murray and all the rivers in the Murray-Darling Basin. This is one aspect of a range of strategies that we are putting in place and it is intended to work as a partnership program. This is funding that is about leveraging additional funding whether it's from the private sector or from State or local Governments.

JOURNALIST: What did Senator Xenophon's efforts amount to how many hundreds of millions, how many extra millions did he shake out of your tree?

WONG: I think there has been a lot written already about those negotiations some of it's been quite interesting reading actually. But what I would say is this: it was made very clear by Nick – and I'll let him speak for himself – how important a range of programs were. This was one of them and I was very pleased to take on board his suggestion not only to allocate guaranteed funding for storm water but, as importantly, to change the way funding guidelines operated so we could expand the number projects that could be funded in partnership by the Federal Government. I don't know if you want to add anything further?

JOURNALIST: Does this indicate the shape of things to come?

XENOPHON: Oh look I think what this indicates today is that the more stormwater we harvest the less water we draw off the Murray. So this is a good news announcement. \$200 million is the Commonwealth's component and when you consider the Commonwealth puts up to half that money we are really looking at upwards of half a billion dollars worth of stormwater harvesting projects in the next two to three years and that is a huge boost in terms of stormwater harvesting and that's good news for South Australia and good news for the country.

JOURNALIST: Is it as much as you were hoping for though?

XENOPHON: I think it's a pretty good start. I think it's a very good start

JOURNALIST: Would you like to see more, will you fight for more?

XENOPHON: I'd always like to see more but this is a very good start and I think that the Government and I have to pay tribute to the Commonwealth and the way that as soon as the negotiations were completed they have been working at breakneck speed to make sure that this happens, and that is a very good sign of how committed the Government is to getting on with stormwater harvesting.

JOURNALIST: Minister Maywald what do you think the State can do with what ever it can get out of Canberra in the way stormwater money?

MAYWALD: Well certainly the \$12.9 billion that the Federal Government now have on the table for a range of different initiatives is extremely welcome its welcome not only by the State of South Australia but by the nation as a whole.

As Senator Xenophon quite rightly indicated this is about leveraging across Government, across Local Government, across State Government and the private sector to get the best possible investments in water projects. It's a terrific initiative it's changed the guidelines to enable smaller projects to have access to Commonwealth funding which means a range of councils that would have not previously been able to access funds will now be able to, and it's a tremendous initiative. We need to ensure that our water supplies come from a whole range of different sources to actually secure our supplies in the future. It's security by diversifying our sources of water and stormwater is one of those sources.

JOURNALIST: Minister we obviously know with these sorts of projects – Salisbury has been a big one for the wetlands – but what sort of interest are you expecting?

MAYWALD: We're certainly expecting a significant amount of interest. There are a number of projects that are currently being worked through in partnership between the Local Government and State Government and our Stormwater Authority. We have just entered into a memorandum of understanding with the Adelaide Airport to look at potential to harvesting water in that area, we are working in Lochiel Park, Cheltenham we have just signed off on. So there is a whole range of projects that will potentially be able to access funding and support from the Federal Government. They will be partnerships between Local Government and State Government and Federal Government that will make these projects work and bring benefits to the broader community.

JOURNALIST: What sorts of opportunities do you think are out there, do you think some of the councils haven't adopted a strategy already that will go for this?

MAYWALD: Once again it's a partnership arrangement that is necessary you need to actually look at the hydrology in the different regions, you need to look at the capacity of the stormwater harvest, you need to look at the capacity to put wetlands in place so that you are able to treat the water before you can put it down into the aquifers. And you also need to see where the draw down areas are that people can use the water too. They are not as straight forward as they seem. They are quite complex projects but by working together with Local Government, State Government with support of the Federal Government these projects can come to fruition and they can be incredibly valuable in relation to a system to secure our water for the future.