**RIVER MURRAY WATERS ACT AMENDMENT BILL 1987**

**Legislative Assembly, 12 November 1987, pages 1894-5**

Second reading

**The Hon. M.K. MAYES (Minister of Agriculture)** obtained leave and introduced a Bill for an Act to approve an agreement for the amendment of the agreement entered into between the Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Australia and the Premiers of the States of New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia with respect to the River Murray and other waters; to amend the River Murray Waters Act 1933; and for other purposes. Read a first time.

The Hon. M.K. MAYES: I move: That this Bill be now read a second time.

I seek leave to have the detailed explanation of the Bill inserted in Hansard without my reading it. Leave granted.

Explanation of Bill

Its purpose is to ratify the Murray-Darling Basin Agreement 1987 and to provide for consequential amendments to the River Murray Waters Act 1983. The Murray-Darling Basin Agreement 1987 is an agreement between the Governments of the Commonwealth, South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales signed on 30 October 1987 . Its purpose is to amend the River Murray Waters Agreement 1982 to provide for improved management of the natural resources of the Murray-Darling Basin. Essentially it does so by providing a sound institutional framework for total catchment management, that is, integration of water, land and environmental resource management throughout the basin on a new level of collaboration and commitment between the four Governments. The Murray-Darling Basin Agreement 1987 is the culmination of negotiations between the four Governments which were pursued expressly to broaden resource management and encompass the total catchment management concept following the 1982 amendments to the River Murray Waters Agreement.

The 1982 amendments were the result of 10 years of negotiations and provided for broadening the power of the River Murray Commission regarding water quality matters. Certainly these amendments were necessary and welcome. However at the same time there was emerging an impetus amongst resource managers which acknowledged the need to integrate water, land and environmental resource management on a total catchment basis if the most effective outcomes were to be realised. Thus the question of improving the then existing arrangements within the Murray-Darling Basin was raised at the Australian Water Resources Council meeting in Darwin in June 1985.

Subsequent to this and arising out of that meeting, a meeting in November 1985 of Ministers from each of the four governments representing the key resource interests agreed to establish a Ministerial Council to exercise general oversight and control over all major policy questions of common interest to the governments involved. The council comprises up to three Ministers from each of the four Governments representing the land, water and environmental interests. An interim institutional arrangement was established in which the River Murray Commission functioned under the umbrella of the council. At the same time the council also initiated the development of a strategy to tackle the basin’s most pressing problems namely river salinity, water logging and land salinisation. I am pleased to inform the House that the development of that strategy is nearing completion and is already demonstrating the value of the new arrangements. At a subsequent meeting on 27 March 1987, Council considered the question of ongoing institutional arrangements and agreed on the following:

a Murray-Darling Basin Commission to encompass the statutory responsibility provided for under the River Murray Waters Agreement and to undertake an advisory role to the Council on land, water and environmental matters not covered in the Agreement;

the Commission will comprise two Commissioners from each Government representing between them water, land and environmental interests; the secretariat to be located with the new Commission to service the work of the Council and the Commission;

governments would share the associated administrative costs of the Commission;

provision will be made in the legislation for later participation by Queensland following further negotiation.

The Murray-Darling Basin Agreement 1987 provides for amendments to the River Murray Waters Agreement 1982 to put those arrangements into effect. I have no need to remind the House of the vital importance that an assured supply of good quality water from the River Murray means to South Australia’s well being and prosperity. The advanced institutional arrangements which this Agreement provides will ensure that resource management is undertaken within the most effective framework and should certainly ensure that the interests of South Australia are properly catered for. I am pleased to submit this Bill for consideration by the House.

Clauses 1 and 2 are formal. Clause 3 approves the 1987 agreement which amends the 1982 agreement. Clause 4 amends the long title to the principal Act to reflect the formal extension of the agreement to the Murray-Darling Basin. Clause 5 amends the short title to the principal Act. Clause 6 incorporates in the definition of ‘the Agreement’ the amendments made by the 1987 agreement. Clause 7 amends section 6 of the principal Act by increasing the number of Commissioners to two. Clauses 8 and 9 make consequential amendments. Clause 10 inserts the 1987 agreement as the second schedule of the principal Act.

The Hon. P.B. ARNOLD secured the adjournment of the debate.