

Monday July 17, 2006

BRACKS DAM BAN WILL PROTECT STATE'S KEY RIVERS

The Bracks Government today announced the banning of dams on Victoria's 18 heritage rivers.

The legislative protection of the 18 rivers is a key plank of the State Government's Environmental Sustainability Action Statement, announced by Premier Steve Bracks today.

Environment and Water Minister John Thwaites said the protection of heritage rivers – including the Snowy and Mitchell rivers - would be strengthened by amendment of the *Heritage Rivers Act*.

“This initiative will help secure a more environmentally sustainable future for some of our most precious rivers and regions,” Mr Thwaites said.

“This decision continues the Government's significant water reforms which are being undertaken in the long-term interests of the community, water users and the environment.

“It reinforces the Government's commitment to protecting and restoring the health of all our rivers, the lifeblood of our State.”

Mr Thwaites said the proposed amendment implemented the Bracks Government's policy to prohibit the damming of rivers protected under the *Heritage Rivers Act*.

“Construction of dams on these heritage rivers would not only impact on the environment but also affect key activities such as fishing, boating and tourism, now and into the future,” he said.

Mr Thwaites said protecting and improving the health of all Victoria's rivers was a key part of the Bracks Government's *Our Water Our Future* action plan to sustainably manage water resources.

“Our Water Our Future is a plan to secure the state's water supplies with a focus on conservation, recycling and finding additional supplies,” Mr Thwaites said.

“The policy will allow us to meet the challenges of climate change and population growth and secure the water supplies for future growth in Victoria – without the need to dam heritage rivers.”

Mr Thwaites said the protected rivers were not just an asset to Victoria but among Australia's most important rivers.

“The iconic Snowy River and the Mitchell River – the largest free-flowing river in south-eastern Australia without a dam – will continue to flow without fear of future interference,” he said.

“The increased protection afforded by this new legislation will help to ensure a more environmentally sustainable future for some of our most precious rivers.”

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The 18 heritage river areas – located across the State – contain significant nature conservation, recreation, scenic or cultural heritage attributes. The rivers and examples of their diverse features are:

- the Glenelg, with its limestone cliffs,
- the Wimmera, with its river red gums and terminal lakes;
- the Aire, flanked by cool temperate rainforest;
- the Lerderderg, including Lerderderg Gorge;
- the Goulburn, Ovens and Yarra, with their floodplain meanders;
- the Howqua, Big, Mitta Mitta, Aberfeldy and Thomson, flowing through steep forested valleys;
- the Mitchell, Snowy and Genoa, with their spectacular gorges;
- the Upper Buchan and Suggan Buggan, located in remote and rugged terrain; and
- the Bemm, with its estuary at Sydenham Inlet.