



Media release

From the Commonwealth Minister for Water and Climate Change and the Victorian Minister for Water

Tuesday, 3 February, 2009

VICTORIAN FARMERS ELIGIBLE FOR DROUGHT EXIT GRANTS

Victorian irrigators can now apply for the Rudd Government's Small Block Irrigators Exit Grant Package, the Federal Minister for Climate Change, Senator Penny Wong, and the Victorian Water Minister, Tim Holding, announced today.

The Small Block Irrigators Exit Grant Package offers up to \$150,000 to eligible irrigators in the Murray-Darling Basin on farms of 15 hectares or less, plus up to \$20,000 in other transitional assistance. Irrigators must sell their water entitlement to the Commonwealth to be eligible for the exit grant.

"This program will help eligible irrigators remain in their family homes and on their farms while getting out of the business of irrigation. It will also help return water to the stressed rivers and wetlands of the Murray-Darling system," Senator Wong said.

The program is now open in all Basin states after the Commonwealth obtained commitments to water reform sought from Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria. Irrigators in South Australia have had access to the Small Block Irrigators Exit Grant Package since November.

Mr Holding said the Victorian Government and the Commonwealth Government had reached agreement on a process to progress water market reforms.

He said a number of Victorian farmers had expressed interest in the package, particularly in the Sunraysia region.

"Although it is always unfortunate to see irrigators moving away from farming, this exit package will allow small-scale irrigators to sell their water rights while staying on their land," Mr Holding said.

"Importantly, it means irrigators impacted by drought and climate change can remain in their homes, many of which have been in the family for generations, and continue to be part of the local community."

Senator Wong encouraged interested irrigators to submit an application form to Centrelink promptly to allow an assessment of eligibility for the program.

"Small block irrigators who intend to apply must offer water entitlements for sale to the Commonwealth through the tender process by 30 April 2009 to ensure they can take advantage of this program," Senator Wong said.

Further details on the eligibility criteria for the grants is available at www.environment.gov.au/water.

Small block irrigators who are seeking further information on the program are encouraged to contact Centrelink on **1800 050 015** or their local Centrelink office. More information on selling water to the Commonwealth is available at www.environment.gov.au or by calling **1800 218 478**.