

NEWS

Over troubled waters

By **Ben Brennan**

A SOUTH Australian Senator has called on the Federal Environment Minister to urgently intervene to end an interstate stalemate over water funding.

South Australia and New South Wales are locked in a tit-for-tat impasse over Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) funding, with both states threatening to slash millions from their contributions to the Authority.

Senator Simon Birmingham has called on Environment Minister Tony Burke to call an urgent Ministerial Council meeting to break the deadlock.

"With NSW cutting \$20 million and South Australia \$14.3 million, key MDBA programs such as the Sustainable Rivers Audit and Native Fish Strategy have already been cut," Mr Birmingham said.

"We are now in danger of los-

ing salinity programs, water quality management and seeing maintenance on essential river infrastructure cut."

Member for Hammond Adrian Pederick has slammed the State Government for its response to NSW's decision to cut its funding, saying the Government had abandoned the River Murray.

"South Australians who have supported the State's Save the Murray campaign should be severely disappointed," Mr Pederick told State Parliament.

"Some three billion dollars has been invested in assets to restore the river's health and now the Murray-Darling Basin Authority will struggle to manage these assets."

MDBA chair Craig Knowles also highlighted the damage the cuts would cause in a speech in Sydney last week.

"It's important to point out, if all governments follow South Australia's lead and cut in simi-

lar proportions (50 per cent) all programs - except for the River

Operations programs with simply a priority on safety - will go," he said.

South Australian Water Minister Ian Hunter levelled the blame for the stand-off at the NSW Government for declaring it would slash funding.

"It's about South Australia standing up to the eastern states and the Commonwealth and saying this is unacceptable, you will not get away with this and that's what we're doing with NSW," he said.

"They (NSW and Victoria) are the ones who have to make more improvements to their water delivery systems.

"They are the ones who need to come to the table with a much bigger commitment than we do.

"We can't have the MDBA shortchanged by NSW and be expected to carry their projects as well as our own."

The Standard's attempts to reach Mr Burke for comment were unsuccessful.