

MEDIA RELEASE

Adrian Pederick MP JP

Member for Hammond
**Shadow Minister for
The River Murray - Forests
Agriculture, Food and Fisheries**

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New water theft penalties only as effective as their enforcement

Steep increases in fines for water theft underline the need for control of the entire Murray Darling Basin to be in the hands of a central body independent of state politics says State Opposition River Murray spokesman Adrian Pederick.

'Penalties for water theft as they stood in South Australia were outdated and manifestly inadequate.

'A recent case demonstrated their ineffectiveness and amounted to little more than a slap on the wrist for the perpetrator. An irrigator who could have afforded to buy more water he wanted was given a good behaviour bond and ordered to pay the value of the water stolen.

'The entire basin needs to be under the control of a single, central controlling body, free from parochial interests, that could apply rules and penalties independently and much more effectively.'

Mr Pederick said substantial penalties are only a deterrent if they are effectively applied. This calls for more policing with wide ranging powers of entry and inspection.

'In reality, we don't want to catch people doing the wrong thing; we want them to do the right thing for the benefit of their fellow irrigators and the broader community through the environment.'

Mr Pederick called on the state government to detail its plans to improve detection and enforcement resources and practices so that new penalties would reduce water theft rather than increase government coffers.