



Shane Rattenbury MLA

Attorney-General

Minister for Consumer Affairs

Minister for Water, Energy and Emissions Reduction

Minister for Gaming

Member for Kurrajong

RESPONSE TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Questions on Notice Paper No 40

22 March 2024

Question No. 1672

MS LAWDER MLA - To ask the Minister for Water, Energy and Emissions Reduction:

- 1) Will the Government be aiming to ensure that the funds of the Federal Government announcement of \$50.5 million package to improve the health of the Upper Murrumbidgee River, specifically the \$30 million contingency reserve for drought, will be used to replace the water which would have been sourced from Icon Water's Tantangara Transfer Option, which the Government allowed Icon Water to terminate in 2018.
- 2) Of the \$5 million for better science and monitoring, will the ACT Government continue to use the Waterwatch program to provide very coarse water quality trend analysis for base flows in rivers and creeks and for lakes and ponds or will this money be used for other monitoring.
- 3) Can the Minister confirm that they will undertake accredited water quality sampling and laboratory analysis, particularly on the Murrumbidgee River, as well as on the other major rivers and creeks, and not just use Waterwatch test kits which are not suitable for this purpose.
- 4) Will dissolved components (such as filtered reactive phosphorus, oxidised nitrogen, ammonium, dissolved organic matter) be measured, given these are major ingredients for algal blooms.
- 5) Will the ACT Government push for the inclusion of the Snowy Scheme in the Basin Plan; if not, why not, considering the critical volumes of water managed by the scheme.

MR RATTENBURY MLA - The answer to the Member's question is as follows:

- 1) The \$30 million contingency reserve is managed by the Commonwealth Government as part of the broader funding commitment to improve the health of the Upper Murrumbidgee

River. The reserve is an interim arrangement for a three-year period, during the review of the Snowy Water Inquiry Outcome Implementation Deed, to be used in the event of drought like conditions requiring additional water to be released from Tantangara Dam. The reserve will not provide a replacement to the entitlements previously held by Icon Water. The proposed review of the Snowy Water Inquiry Outcome Implementation Deed and the NSW Snowy Water Licence is intended to examine longer-term solutions for water security in the region.

- 2) The \$5 million of Commonwealth funding for science and monitoring to improve the health of the Upper Murrumbidgee River will be shared between the ACT and NSW governments, to fund activities that support the review of the Snowy Water Inquiry Outcome Implementation Deed. The funding is not intended to replace existing monitoring programs such as the Waterwatch program. The program of monitoring and science to be funded by the Commonwealth and conducted by the ACT and NSW governments is still in design.
- 3) The ACT Lakes and Rivers monitoring program, which includes sampling of the Murrumbidgee River, is conducted by a laboratory accredited by the National Association of Testing Authorities (NATA). Waterwatch is designed to provide surveillance monitoring of the ACT's waterways.
- 4) The ACT Lakes and Rivers monitoring program analyses water samples for total nitrogen, ammonia, nitrite plus nitrate, total phosphorus and total organic carbon. There are no plans to include filtered reactive phosphorus in the monitoring program as the Government is focused on tracing the origins of phosphorus in stormwater through separate programs.
- 5) The ACT Government supports the inclusion of the Snowy Scheme as part of the Murray Darling Basin Plan and advocated for this inclusion in its engagement on the Water Amendment (Restoring Our Rivers) Bill 2023.

The Commonwealth Government has acknowledged that the Basin Plan applies to all Basin Waters, including the Upper Murrumbidgee River, except for where it is inconsistent with the NSW Snowy Water Licence. The 2023 amendment to the Water Act, under section 85ABA), requires an annual report to be prepared on the release of water for the environmental use from the Snowy Scheme.

A review of the Snowy Water Inquiry Outcome Implementation Deed would subsequently cause a review of the NSW Snowy Licence. This creates an opportunity to bring the Snowy Water Licence into alignment with the Basin Plan.

Approved for circulation to the Member and incorporation into Hansard.

Shane Rattenbury MLA
Minister for Water, Energy and Emissions Reduction



Date:.....13/4/24.....

This response required 55mins to complete, at an approximate cost of \$109.23.