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## **REQUEST TO FAST TRACK EXTRA FLOWS FOR RIVER MURRAY SYSTEM**

The NSW Government was today asked to fast track a project with the potential to provide the drought-ravaged River Murray system with significant additional fresh water.

Snowy Hydro Limited, which is Australia's largest hydro electricity company, believes the NSW, Victorian and South Australian economies would benefit directly from the project, along with farmers and irrigators along the Murray and Murrumbidgee rivers. However, the environment would be the major winner.

Cooma-based Snowy Hydro wants the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) to fast track a proposed cloud seeding trial which has the potential to help save the country's largest river system. Cloud seeding is a modern water management technique whereby small quantities of silver iodide would be dispersed into specifically-targeted clouds passing over the Snowy Mountains, in southern New South Wales, to increase snowfall. It is not intended to produce rain - only snow - so that the Alpine environment is enhanced, while spring run-off delivers improved flows downstream.

Snowy Hydro Chief Executive, Mr Terry Charlton, said the Company was eager to embark on a six-year trial in the Snowy Mountains beginning next winter.

"We are prepared to commit \$5 million per annum over that time for the project to proceed," Mr Charlton said.

"The project has the potential to generate more than 100 billion litres - or 100 gigalitres - of extra water flow into the River Murray system each year of the trial."

Snowy Hydro's appeal to the NSW Government comes a week before the Commonwealth of Australian Governments (CoAG) is due to meet to consider another proposal to spend \$120 million of taxpayer funds to improve the River environment by flushing it out with the same volumes of water as available under the cloud seeding initiative.

"The country is in the middle of one of its worst droughts in history, one of the nation's greatest rivers is in dire straits, and we have the means to make a valuable contribution to additional freshwater flows of that system," Mr Charlton said.

"This is an issue of national importance which has social and economic ramifications for three states across the nation," he said.

"We believe the NPWS should give this proposal the highest priority but it may need Government commitment to make it happen.

"Experience overseas and in Tasmania has shown cloud seeding can bring urgent relief to irrigators, river communities, regional economies and 'end water users' in the South Australian portion of the River."

Two independent studies have shown that there are sufficient suitable clouds passing over the Snowy Mountains to achieve a 10 per cent increase in snowfall, which could increase snow depth by about 15cm, and extend the snow season by 3-4 days. The melting snow will then run into catchment areas that feed the broader River Murray and Murrumbidgee systems.

The process has proven successful in Tasmania, and is a routine winter occurrence in over 100 catchments within the United States.

Mr Charlton said while Snowy Hydro would benefit financially from the project through increased electricity generation - this was far less important than the economical and environmental benefits to the country.

“The extra flows - 100 billion litres of water a year every year - from this proposal would be the equivalent in new volume to one Olympic size swimming pool released into the River Murray every five minutes of every hour, of every day of the year,” Mr Charlton said.

“There are arguments that 100 gigalitres is only a small amount of the total increased flows required to help revive the River Murray system.

“This may be true, but 100 gigalitres is a start in the right direction and is larger than any other single water efficiency project in the Murray Basin.

“From a taxpayer’s point of view, our proposal should be attractive to the Federal Government and other State Governments as they investigate ways of providing additional water for the Murray.

“Snowy Hydro works closely with the NPWS and we believe we can do so on this project in a way that will give the Service comfort, provide invaluable scientific data, meet our stakeholders’ valid expectations and provide a short to medium term practical solution to a practical problem.”

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For further information please contact:

Paul Johnson  
Snowy Hydro Limited  
(02) 9278 1888