



MEDIA RELEASE

Senator the Hon Penny Wong

Minister for Climate Change and Water

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SMALL BLOCK IRRIGATORS EXIT GRANT PACKAGE EXPANDED

More irrigators in the Murray-Darling Basin can apply for the Small Block Irrigators Exit Grant Package under revised guidelines announced today by Minister for Climate Change and Water, Senator Penny Wong.

Senator Wong said the revised guidelines reflected the changes approved by Parliament during negotiations over the Government's economic stimulus package in February.

"Under these revisions, the Small Block Irrigators Exit Grant Package has been extended to irrigators with farms between 15 and 40 hectares," Senator Wong said.

This means that an irrigator may now be eligible for the grant if:

- on 20 September 2008, they owned up to 15 hectares of farm land and at least 10 megalitres of tradeable water entitlements; or
- on 13 February 2009, they owned more than 15 hectares and up to 40 hectares of farmland and at least 10 megalitres of tradeable water entitlements.

Irrigators must sell all their water entitlements to the Australian Government to be eligible for the package.

"This expansion of the Small Block Irrigators Exit Grant Package provides increased opportunities for irrigators to exit the industry while remaining in their own homes and communities," Senator Wong said.

"This decision will also help return more water to the Basin's stressed rivers and wetlands."

Senator Wong encouraged interested irrigators to apply to Centrelink promptly to allow an assessment of eligibility. Application forms must be lodged with Centrelink by 30 June 2009.

"Small block irrigators who intend to apply must also offer their water entitlements for sale to the Commonwealth through the current tender process by 30 June 2009," Senator Wong said.

Senator Wong said the package now comprised an Irrigation Exit Grant of up to \$150,000, up to \$10,000 for advice and re-training, and up to \$20,000 to help remove permanent plantings and production-related infrastructure.

"Access to planning and retraining assistance is available through Centrelink's Rural Service Officers who will help irrigators develop plans for their property and seek alternative employment after leaving irrigated agriculture."

Small block irrigators seeking further information about the program should contact Centrelink on 1800 050 015 or their local Centrelink office. More information on selling water to the Australian Government is available at www.environment.gov.au or by calling 1800 218 478.