



NSW Government

Department of Water & Energy

Council given 48 hours to comply

23 January 2008

Wentworth Shire Council has today been given 48 hours to comply with the current 323 Order prohibiting the watering of domestic lawns, or face possible legal action.

The Department of Water and Energy has requested that Council take action to comply with the current Order under Section 323 of the *Water Management Act 2000*, which was gazetted in October 2007.

If Council ignores this request and is found to be in breach of the *Water Management Act 2000* it could face a fine of up to \$275,000 under the Act and a further daily penalty of \$132,000 for each day the offence continues.

Minister for Climate Change, Environment and Water Phil Koperberg today said he is extremely disappointed with Wentworth Shire Council's decision, which, while he noted was not unanimous, could threaten the current water sharing arrangements that have been negotiated to secure water for essential agriculture industries, many of which are in the Wentworth Shire area.

"I find it staggering that a Council could willfully decide to jeopardise water resources during this record breaking drought," he said.

"Watering lawns is a luxury when many local water dependent businesses are struggling to survive.

"To date all councils in the Murray Valley and the NSW and Victorian governments have been working cooperatively to ensure the future of our rural communities.

"The Lemna Government has worked co-operatively and consulted exhaustively with water users and local councils to manage limited water resources.

"This has included several visits to affected areas and industries as well as establishing the Murray Darling Advisory Council which was one of my first acts as the Minister for Water.

"This work was intended to include the community in decisions about water use that affect the entire system, including over the border, in the hope that NSW utilities would comply.

"It's a shame that Wentworth Shire Council has decided to act uncooperatively and may have breached the *Water Management Act 2000*.

"In fact, with all Murray Valley towns currently on 50 per cent of entitlement, we suspect that the Council may now over-draw their water account, which could incur further penalties under the Act."

While there is a good flush of water coming down the Darling River and there has been a small improvement to Murray irrigation supplies, high and general security licence holders still have no water allocation, some towns are carting water, water for essential purposes for 2008/09 has not yet been fully secured, and it's still unclear whether licence holders will start the water year with an allocation.

Water availability in the Murray Valley is still critical and it is irresponsible for local councils to lift all water restrictions at this stage.

All NSW Murray Valley councils are advised to remain on level 3 water restrictions and the ban on watering private lawns remains in place.

This is consistent with the level of water restrictions in Victoria, where all Murray Valley councils remain on level 4, 3a or 3 water restrictions, except in the Goulburn Valley which has moved to level 1 after recent heavy rainfall.