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INQUIRY FINDS DESALINATION PROJECT SITE ACCEPTABLE

An independent inquiry into the \$3.1 billion Victorian Desalination Project has found the desalination project will result in significant benefits to the state.

Planning Minister Justin Madden today released the independent inquiry's report into the desalination plant Environmental Effects Statement (EES) and his assessment of the project.

"The independent Inquiry has found the chosen site at Wonthaggi is suitable for the desalination plant," Mr Madden said.

"After assessing the independent report, I have supported all but one of the 42 recommendations.

"I have also made modifications to the recommendations to strengthen and clarify the project requirements and encourage innovative design for a project which will be one of the biggest in Victoria's history."

"The EES process considered a range of potential environmental effects of the project – including on flora, fauna, water quality, landscape values and social impacts," he said.

Mr Madden said the inquiry found the technology and associated processes for construction and operations of the desalination plant are in-line with best practice and use proven technologies.

"As a result, the project can proceed subject to environmental management measures and other approvals being obtained," Mr Madden said.

"Any environmental impacts that result from the desalination plant can be largely minimised or off-set to acceptable levels through the application of strict requirements that will determine how the final project is delivered.

The proposed desalination plant will have the capacity to produce 150 to 200 gigalitres (GL) of drinking water per annum, which is a key part of the Brumby Government's response to the ongoing drought and the need for water security across the state."

The EES also looked at the marine structures for the seawater intake and outlet, water transfer pipeline to connect with Melbourne's supply network, and power supply infrastructure.

"The inquiry acknowledged the potential for some environmental impacts, but found that they could be effectively managed through a range of mitigation measures and performance requirements," he said.

In releasing the inquiry's report, Mr Madden noted some of its key findings, including:

- An independent reviewer and auditor be appointed to ensure compliance with environmental performance requirements;
- Measures be implemented to ensure the conservation of flora and fauna and sensitive marine areas and maintenance of flood dependent ecosystems;

- The need to minimise impacts on agricultural productivity, and areas of landscape significance;
- The management of the social impacts of construction of the desalination plant on the local area; and
- The need for DSE to work closely with the various councils and authorities during the construction of the desalination plant to minimise disruption.

The EES attracted over 400 submissions, and public hearings were held to give the community a chance to comment on the project.

Desalination plant construction is scheduled to begin later this year with the first water from the plant due to be supplied at the end of 2011.

The inquiry's report is available at www.dpcd.vic.gov.au/planning/ees