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Press statement: River Murray Waters Agreement Amendment Act

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PRESS STATEMENT FROM THE PREMIER, MR. DUNSTAN.

RIVER MURRAY WATERS AGREEMENT AMENDMENT ACT.

19/8/71.

The South Australian Government has decided to ratify the Amending Act of the River Murray Waters Agreement allowing work to proceed on the Dartmouth Dam, the Premier (Mr. Dunstan) announced today.

Mr. Dunstan was introducing the River Murray Waters Act Amendment Bill (No. 2), described as the 'ratifying bill', in the House of Assembly.

He said that it was necessary for the Government to report to the House and to the people of South Australia that the Government's negotiations concerning the dams on the River Murray have failed.

"This means that the State will no longer be able to retain the special rights and protections the Chowilla storage would have given it".

"We have endeavoured to negotiate constantly. We have repeatedly put forward proposals for sensible compromise on the issue, retaining South Australia's special rights to the Chowilla Dam and the special protection to the State provided by such a storage."

But, the Premier said, the other States and the Commonwealth, had said they had "an agreement from a Government in South Australia".

"The Government is forced to ratify the Amended Agreements which the previous L.C.L. Government negotiated with Victoria, New South Wales and the Commonwealth, because of the impasse reached in negotiations."

"There is now a real possibility that the Victorian Government will withdraw entirely from agreements to provide additional storages on the River Murray."

Mr. Dunstan said that the other States and the Commonwealth were not concerned in any way with the internal State support or otherwise for the Amended Agreement.

"They could not care less that the Amending Agreement removed, in effect, the special right South Australia had to the protections Chowilla offers."

"Nor, apparently, did the previous South Australian Government, which signed the Agreement."

Mr. Dunstan said that in negotiations, the other States would not concede that they should consider the nature of further water rights to South Australia if other storages, including Chowilla, are built.

He said that although the Commonwealth conceded that the costs of works at Lake Victoria needed for the Dartmouth Dam scheme should not be taken into account against the building of a dam at Chowilla, neither New South Wales nor Victoria would concede such a position.

"The real danger for South Australia then was that if we continued present negotiations, Victoria would withdraw entirely from agreements and negotiations for the provision of additional storages on the River Murray."

"This could endanger the use of additional River Murray water by South Australia in the foreseeable future."

"Under the Amending Agreement, Chowilla will be looked at as a possible future storage, not on the basis of the protections it can give to South Australia, but of its yield and advantage to the total river system."

"This is a sad thing for South Australia, since the Dartmouth Dam will not provide immediate water protection, will take years to build and even more years to store water."