

Hon Jay Weatherill MP
Premier

Hon Ian Hunter MLC
Minister for Water

Saturday, 16 December 2017

Bret Walker SC recommended to lead Murray-Darling Basin Royal Commission

Premier Jay Weatherill will recommend one of Australia's foremost barristers Bret Walker SC be appointed to lead the Murray-Darling Basin Royal Commission.

Draft Terms of Reference have also been released for the Royal Commission into widespread allegations upstream irrigators are stealing water from the Murray-Darling River system.

The Royal Commission will thoroughly investigate allegations of non-compliance and mismanagement and whether these allegations have been properly investigated. The investigation will also assess current legislative arrangements and whether any changes are necessary.

The Premier will recommend Mr Walker to the Governor, with the Royal Commission to begin its work early in the new year.

It's anticipated the Royal Commission will report by 1 February 2019, but will have the power to deliver interim reports.

Background

Bret Walker has been practicing law since 1979. He was President of the Law Council of Australia in the 1990s and President of the New South Wales Bar Association from 2001 to 2003.

He is currently a constitutional law adviser to the Law Council of Australia, editor of New South Wales Law Reports, a foundation fellow of the Australian Academy of Law and a member of the Uniform Legal Services Council.

Last month, Premier Jay Weatherill announced the State Government would establish a Royal Commission into widespread allegations of water theft by upstream irrigators.

Various media reports this year have revealed allegations of wrongdoing in upstream states.

The State Government called for the Commonwealth to establish a Royal Commission, but this was rejected by Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull.

On November 25, the Murray-Darling Basin Water Compliance Review revealed the upstream states and the Federal Government are ignoring allegations of water theft and failing to enforce the Murray-Darling Basin Plan.

Quotes attributable to Premier Jay Weatherill

Bret Walker SC is eminently qualified to thoroughly investigate these widespread allegations of wrongdoing across the Murray-Darling Basin.

This will be an independent and rigorous investigation. Time is of the essence, so this Royal Commission will begin early in the new year and conclude by February 2019.

If evidence emerges of criminality, we'll have no hesitation in pursuing the perpetrators.

And if South Australia can demonstrate loss as a consequence of this misbehaviour, we will pursue our civil rights.

We're establishing this Royal Commission because we're standing up for South Australia. But in protecting South Australia's interests, we're also protecting the national interest.

Quotes attributable to Water Minister Ian Hunter

It's clear the problem is a lack of political will to enforce the Basin Plan.

The Federal Government and the upstream states have had long enough to fix this problem.

Through this Royal Commission, we will ensure South Australia gets every drop of water we're entitled to receive.

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