

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

**Phil Costa**  
**Minister for Water**  
**Minister for Regional Development**



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### **PLANNING APPROVAL GRANTED FOR GREEN OFFSETS PROJECT**

Plans are underway for a project to remove more than 1500 tonnes of salt from the Murray River catchment each year under new partnership between the NSW Government and paper manufacturing company Norske Skog, NSW Minister for Water, Phil Costa announced today.

“The Billabong Creek Green Offsets project will bring significant benefits for the environment and the community of Albury,” Minister Costa said.

“This partnership will also ensure we can reduce our environmental footprint and encourage business and employment in rural areas.

“Under the plan, the Norske Skog paper mill in Albury will discharge an average of three megalitres of treated water into the Murray River per day in return the company will fund the operation of the nearby Billabong Creek Salt Interception Scheme.

“The ongoing funding commitment will allow the Billabong Creek Salt Interception Scheme at Walla Walla to operate continuously, bringing significant environmental benefits to the health of the river system.

“The scheme not only prevents saline groundwater from the area entering the creek but also brings fresh water into the Billabong Creek, improving its water quality and quantity to drought stricken stock domestic users in the area.

“This is an important partnership for the local economy - Norske Skog currently employs more than 200 people in Albury and injects about \$100 million into the local economy each year through jobs, purchasing local materials and use of local contractors.

“I’d like to thank Norske Skog in remaining committed to this project - innovative partnerships like this are essential to the economic and environmental sustainability for country areas hit by drought,” said Mr Costa

“Under the plan, very strict water licence conditions will be in place and the company will be required to monitor the quantity, frequency and quality of water releases into the Murray River and submit regular reports to the regulatory authorities.

“A key condition of Norske Skog’s environment protection licence is that the paper mill can only discharge a licenced limit of salt into the Murray River when river flows exceed the discharge volume by at least 600 to 1.

“The discharges will be within the safe range for aquatic ecosystems according to the Australian and New Zealand Environment and Conservation Council guidelines.

“Under the proposed plan, the Murray Catchment Management Authority will establish a corridor of native bush that stretches from Gum Swamp to the Billabong Creek at Morgan’s Lookout, connecting two sites that have high environmental and archaeological values.”

The Billabong Creek Green Offsets project has been implemented as a condition imposed on a modification to the paper mill approved by the State Government in July 2009.