

**Karlene Maywald MP**  
**Murraylink ACCC Forum Speech Notes – 8 July 2003**

I am here today to represent the communities in the Riverland region. We in the Riverland have been at the fore front of the debates over where, when and how a new electricity interconnector into South Australia from the eastern states would be built. We are the communities, the people who will be and are directly affected by this infrastructure. And this debate has caused concern for almost every community group that I represent.

For more than 7 years now there has been a proposal to bring this much needed extra electricity through our community by using large and necessarily intrusive overhead transmission towers. No one wants to see the ugly constructions going through their backyards, across their properties, or in fact anywhere near particularly sensitive environmental areas or areas that are of value to the community in respect of environment and tourism.

However we were repeatedly reminded that overhead towers were the only way this power could be brought in – that is, we had no choice as underground lines over that distance were not possible.

That is until TransÉnergie introduced them selves and their innovative approach to project development and management, and ABB's innovative technology to us. One of the most extraordinary achievements of this company is that they were able to actually fully work with our community to achieve general consensus on absolutely every part of the Murraylink project. For an electricity transmission company that is quite an outstanding effort. Even during construction, the community of the Riverland in which I live in and represent, hardly knew they were there.

One of the most important things about this project is that it has been very, very unobtrusive on the environment. Our community has accepted it. We welcome the TransÉnergie Company in our region with open arms.

As part of the Murraylink project, we have seen companies like PIHA develop new technology. ABB have invested an enormous amount of money, time and expertise in developing the HVDC light technology. Murraylink have managed to build and bring it all together. Canadians, Swedes, Australians, all sorts of nationalities were involved in this project and it has demonstrated that through innovation, major infrastructure can be built without adverse impacts on communities and the environment.

From a South Australian electricity perspective, we all know that South Australia is having a difficult time when it comes to electricity pricing. We have been told that a regulated asset to connect South Australia with the NSW grid at Buronga will most likely have a positive downward pressure on electricity prices in this State. We also understand that the SNI project has been granted regulatory status, but that it is not yet built and not likely to be built for some time to come

Murraylink is here now and has been delivering and continues to deliver benefits to South Australia in terms of increased electricity supply, positive downward pressure on electricity prices and increased environmental benefits.

The Riverland Community is well aware of the on-going debate on interconnection, and in particular the political controversy that has surrounded the building of the SNI, and Murraylink Interconnectors.

During the course of the development and construction of the Murraylink Interconnector, there was very little community concern about this project.

Quite the opposite is true for the SNI Interconnector. This projects initial preferred route was strongly opposed by farmers and environmentalists alike as it was proposed to transverse many private properties as well as crossing the Murray River three times.

As a result of a strong lobby effort, the projects preferred route was changed to north of the River Murray, however it still receives strong opposition as it transverses a section of the Bookmark Biosphere Reserve.

The Riverland community accepts that there is a strong argument which supports bringing electricity into South Australia through a regulated interconnector, but they can not understand why we need to have another power line to deliver this, particularly when the Murraylink project is constructed and operational now. The Riverland community cannot understand why we need a second line particularly when it will be ugly and obtrusive.

It would seem that a practical solution would be to incorporate the Murraylink Interconnector as part of the regulated assets, instead of duplicating it with another one. It is operational now, and could deliver the benefits of a regulated interconnector years ahead of the proposed SNI Interconnector.

This particular project has demonstrated quite clearly that communities do not have to be subject to ugly, obtrusive infrastructure for the supply of Electricity. Communities around Australia will be looking at this project and they will be saying “You did it there, it can be done, why aren’t you doing it here in our backyard?” It is going to increase the pressure on politicians. It is going to increase the pressure on planning authorities who are giving approvals to particular projects around Australia to actually look at alternatives and to look at this technology, to look at the HVDC light technology.