

Basin Community Committee Meeting Summary

30 November, 1 & 2 December 2009



The Basin Community Committee (BCC) held meeting 4 in Albury, NSW on 30 November, 1 & 2 of December 2009.

The first joint meeting between the MDBA and the BCC was held on 1 December 2009 to discuss the Sustainable Diversion Limits (SDLs), Environmental Watering Plan, Key Environmental Assets and responses to BCC recommendations to the Authority.

Other elements of the meeting were the information session with stakeholders from around the region to participate in learning about the Basin Plan, and a field trip to the Kiewa valley to learn about local environmental issues.

Basin Plan update

MDBA staff presented the BCC with a comprehensive update on the Basin Plan developments. A wide ranging discussion on the Environmental Watering Plan saw the BCC highlight significant issues that were of concern to local communities. Key topics covered included:

- the methodology to identify key environmental assets – outlining key priorities and water needs in high impacted catchments
- ecosystem functions
- environmental water requirements.

The BCC discussed that the framework for the environmental watering plan closely follow the content in the *Water Act 2007*.

Members also received presentations on Critical Human Water Needs, as outlined in the Murray-Darling Basin Agreement, and in particular the need for conveyance water was discussed.

Members were also given an in-depth explanation of the role of the MDBA in relation to water trade and its linkages to the SDLs, water quality and salinity management plan and water resource plan requirements and accreditation process.

Sustainable Diversion Limits (SDLs) issues paper and stakeholder forums

The SDLs issues paper was released to the public on Thursday 12 November 2009 for stakeholder input, comment and discussion. Public submissions are welcome until the 18 December 2009. For a copy of the SDLs issues paper, and details on how to make a submission please visit the MDBA website: www.mdba.gov.au

The MDBA has scheduled two forums and an Indigenous Gathering to provide key stakeholders with more detailed information about Basin Plan developments and specifically the SDL issues paper. Dates for these are provided below:

Northern Basin Rivers Indigenous Gathering	9 & 10 December 2009, Moree NSW
Peak Bodies Forum	14 & 15 December 2009, Canberra ACT
Government and Science Forum	16 & 17 December 2009, Canberra ACT

The forums will also provide detailed, interactive discussions between Basin Plan staff and stakeholders. Members of the BCC will assist with the forums and act as facilitators in small group discussions.

Information Session

The MDBA and BCC jointly hosted an information session at the Adamshurst Restaurant and Function Centre in Albury on 1 December. The session attracted 100 participants from local communities including industry, government, Indigenous and environment groups.

The format for the day included presentations from the MDBA Chair, Mike Taylor, the BCC Acting Chair, Ian Falconer, MDBA Basin Plan staff and key local stakeholders Alex Anthony, Chair Murray CMA, Paul Carrick, Chair North East CMA and Ben Gawne, Director Murray-Darling Freshwater Research Centre. A question and answer session to address issues and concerns on the proposed Basin Plan was also conducted. Key themes included:

- the science behind the plan
- the use of local, regional knowledge in the development of the Basin Plan
- the consideration of water-buybacks in the SDLs
- the social and economic analysis and implications
- the Basin plan Information needs to be in plain English to allow a greater understanding of the issues within Basin communities.

The session was broken into small groups to discuss topics around the development of the SDLs specifically focusing on the following questions:

1. What are your views on the proposed approaches set out in the SDL issues paper
2. Do you have any suggestions you would like to provide the MDBA in regard to the SDLs?

The small groups provided wide-ranging discussions and highlighted the following:

- Why are irrigators subject to double accounting when rivers lose water naturally?
- How will interstate trade be dealt with under the Basin Plan?
- How will surface and groundwater be developed? Every area will be different.

The information gathered from these discussions verbally and in writing will be scrutinised by the MDBA and will be considered in the development of the Basin Plan.

Facing the Music Workshop

On day three of the meeting, members attended a workshop focused on practical tips on how to maximise engagement opportunities with stakeholders, particularly in difficult meetings. The workshop was very successful and members were able to share experiences and effective tools to use in preparation for consulting with communities on elements of the Basin Plan.

Field trip

A field trip to the Kiewa Valley, hosted by the North-East Catchment Management Authority and the Murray Catchment Management Authority, provided members with insight to some of the environmental works and issues faced in the region.

The first stop was the Murray River Gateway Island which focused on The Living Murray resnagging project. A visit to Yackandandah Creek on the Kiewa Valley Highway provided an insight into the effects of mining in the area which saw a buildup of sediments along the banks of the creek. Members were also presented with a first-hand view of the fire recovery works and riparian zone improvement at a local farm in the Kiewa Valley.

MDBA Stakeholder Engagement branch

The stakeholder engagement branch has been organising a series of shop-fronts and key engagement activities in preparation for the release of the draft Basin Plan. An information booth was erected in Albury on 30 November to provide the community with information on the Basin Plan.

The Department for Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts (DEWHA) are currently running forums to provide whole-of-government information on a range of water programs. Selected MDBA staff are participating in these forums to provide information on the development of the Basin Plan and its associated stakeholder engagement process.

BCC outcomes

Members talked about the need for investigations into the concept of indigenous cultural flows and its importance to indigenous communities.

Sub-committees

Members of the MDBA endorsed the establishment of a fourth BCC subcommittee, the Urban, Industry and Recreation Water Subcommittee in addition to the other subcommittees as described in the Water Act 2007.

Membership:

- Irrigation – Russell Pell (Chair), Mary-Lou Gittins, Guy Roth, Rory Treweeke
- Environmental water – Arlene Buchan (Chair), Henry Jones, Sarah Nicholas, Dick Thompson.
- Indigenous water – Matthew Rigney (Chair), Cheryl Buchanan, Kathryn Ridge, Les Gordon.
- Urban, Industry and Recreation water – Danielle Anderson (Chair), Ian Falconer, Jeff Parish.

BCC activities

Members of the BCC continue to participate in local meetings, forums and other activities in local regions. A summary of member activities and key issues raised within these sessions, are provided by members at each BCC meeting for consideration.

Next meeting

The next meeting of the BCC will be in Goolwa, South Australia on 2 and 3 February 2010.