

How the new Murray-Darling Basin Plan is being developed

The Murray-Darling Basin Authority today released a 'Concept Statement' which explains the key elements and approach being taken in developing the new Basin Plan.

The release follows the first meeting of the new Authority members in Canberra on 1 and 2 June.

MDBA Chair Mr Michael Taylor AO said this was the first document about the Basin Plan to be published by the Authority.

“As part of the process for resolving the Basin’s water challenges, the Authority has been given the historic task by the Commonwealth Parliament of preparing a strategic plan for the integrated and sustainable management of water resources across the whole Basin,” he said.

“This is planning at a scale and complexity that have never been undertaken anywhere else in the world. The Basin is under enormous stress as a result of past water-allocation decisions, prolonged drought, natural climate variability and emerging climate change.

“The plan will provide a fundamental framework for future water-planning arrangements. It will be based on the best and latest scientific, social, cultural and economic knowledge, evidence and analysis.”

Mr Taylor said the Concept Statement sets out the purpose of the Basin Plan, what it will contain, how it is being developed and when the Proposed Plan will be released.

It describes the key elements of the Plan, how it will be developed and how it will affect the three million people who directly depend on its resources. It also details the complexity of managing the Murray-Darling’s vast surface and groundwater resources.

Some of the main functions of the Basin Plan will be to:

- set and enforce environmentally sustainable limits on the quantities of surface water and groundwater that may be taken from Basin water resources
- set Basin-wide environmental objectives, and water quality and salinity objectives
- develop efficient water trading regimes across the Basin
- set requirements that must be met by state water resource plans
- improve water security for all uses of Basin water resources.

Mr Taylor said a proposed plan will be issued for public discussion and formal consultation in mid-2010 and the final Plan in 2011.

“But it will not be a one-off document,” he said. “It is an ongoing and dynamic process, with periods of review and revision to come in the future, in the light of the practicalities of implementation and of changing knowledge and information.

“I and my fellow members of the Authority and our staff are committed to devoting our energy and all our combined expertise — in water, the environment, natural resource management and agriculture — to developing the plan, and building a better future for the Murray-Darling Basin – for its environment, industries and communities.”

A copy of the Concept Statement is available for download at www.mdba.gov.au

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