

## Murray–Darling Basin water ministers meet in Brisbane

17 October 2014

The Murray–Darling Basin Ministerial Council met in Brisbane today to consider a range of basin management and water reform matters and to be updated on the progress of Basin Plan implementation.

The Ministerial Council is chaired by the Hon. Simon Birmingham (Commonwealth) with members from each basin state—the Hon. Kevin Humphries MP (NSW), the Hon. Peter Walsh MP (Victoria), the Hon. Andrew Cripps (Queensland), the Hon. Ian Hunter (South Australia) and Mr Simon Corbell MLA (ACT).

Ministers agreed to apply the historic cost sharing formula for long-standing jointly-funded programs in the basin. Ministers requested preparation of advice for their next meeting on the treatment of future Living Murray Environmental Works and Measures Program operations and maintenance costs. Ministers also confirmed the importance of stable multi-year funding arrangements for the proper management of joint assets.

The ministers were briefed on the draft findings of the review into the cost efficiency of River Murray Operations. The review examined the costs of water management and delivery services by the Murray–Darling Basin Authority and State Constructing Authorities; Goulburn–Murray Water; State Water Corporation and SA Water.

To improve ministerial oversight of River Murray Operations, the council agreed to establish a new River Murray Operations Committee representing all southern basin jurisdictions. This replaces and improves upon previous structures.

The ministerial council also agreed to improve the coordination of watering activities in the southern connected basin in order to streamline environmental watering. Ministers further agreed to look at opportunities to better integrate environmental monitoring and evaluation activities across the basin to avoid duplication and to meet regional, state, basin and national reporting obligations.

Council noted progress with basin plan implementation and in particular the criticality of ensuring that the program of work to support the northern basin review was delivered on schedule.

Progress on the forward work program for the Sustainable Diversion Limit adjustment process was also noted by ministers and they emphasised the need for all agencies to meet the timeframes for the operation of the SDL adjustment in 2016 set out in the Intergovernmental Agreement on Implementing Water Reform in the Murray–Darling Basin.

Ministers were advised that while additional flows delivered through the Basin Plan have slowed the rate of sand build-up at the Murray Mouth, connectivity between the Coorong and the sea is progressively declining. In light of low inflows expected in the system over coming year due to drier climatic conditions, ministers agreed to an additional budget of \$4 million to allow the MDBA to undertake dredging to keep the Murray Mouth open, in the event it is needed.

Finally, ministers acknowledged the contribution of current MDBA chair Craig Knowles during his four-year term, particularly in relation to his emphasis on involving local communities in the development of the basin plan, following his recent announcement that he will step down from the role when his term expires in January 2015.

The next Ministerial Council will be held in early 2015.

Ends

For further information, contact MDBA media: (02) 6279 0141