

Murray–Darling Basin Authority
Meeting 106 – 14 February 2017 - Melbourne
Minutes

Members in Attendance: The Hon Neil Andrew (Chair); Ms Dianne Davidson; Mr George Warne; Professor Barry Hart; Ms Susan Madden; and the MDBA Chief Executive, Mr Phillip Glyde.

Mr Rory Treweeke, Chair Basin Community Committee attended as a guest.

Supported by relevant agency staff.

Agenda item 1: Opening of meeting, disclosure of interests and apologies

1. The Chair, Mr Neil Andrew, opened the meeting at 8 am and welcomed members, Mr Treweeke and MDBA staff. There were no apologies.

Conflict of Interest

2. No member declared any conflict of interest in relation to any items on the agenda. However, Ms Susan Madden noted she was employed by GHD, which had undertaken some work identified in the Chief Executive's report. She noted she was not involved in the work.
3. The Authority **noted** the opening remarks of the Chair.

Agenda item 2: Adoption of draft agenda

4. The Authority **adopted** the draft agenda.

Agenda item 3: Confirmation of minutes of meeting 105

5. The Authority **confirmed** the minutes from meeting 105 held on 6 December 2016.

Agenda item 4: Chair's report

6. The Chair noted that this meeting coincided with the 100th anniversary of the first meeting of the River Murray Commission and the launch of *Sharing the water – 100 years of River Murray politics*.
7. Mr Andrew reported on the Basin Plan amendment consultation tour covering communities in the northern Basin and the final meeting of the Northern Basin Advisory Committee during December 2016. He also reported on the range of meetings in the southern Basin and meetings with the Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists, Healthy Rivers Australia and the South Australian Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources during January and February 2017.
8. The Chair noted the extensive scrutiny of the MDBA and the range of assessments being undertaken by the agency, which will ensure that 2017 is a busy year for all involved.
9. The Authority **noted** the Chair's report.

Agenda item 5: Basin Community Committee Chair's report

10. Mr Rory Treweeke, Chair of the Basin Community Committee (BCC) reported on the activities and observations of BCC members. He noted there were still unfounded community concerns that the sustainable diversion limit reduction in the northern Basin might have to be picked up by associated increases in the southern Basin.
11. Mr Treweeke also reported concerns from some stakeholders about the process. Authority members commented that such concerns about the process appeared to be driving a number of freedom of information (FOI) requests and was without basis. He also noted that BCC members still had concerns about the extent of adherence to the toolkit measures identified through the Northern Basin Review.
12. He stressed the need for improved compliance to underpin sound management of Basin resources.
13. The Authority:
 - (a) **requested** information on the roles and responsibilities of the Authority and the MDBA in relation to compliance
 - (b) **noted** the report from the BCC Chair and members.

Agenda item 6: Authority members' updates

14. Authority members provided a brief update on the range of meetings they had been involved in. Members noted the increased level of commentary on the Basin Plan meetings such as the 450 GL upwater and the SDL adjustment mechanism.
15. The Authority **noted** the updates from the Authority members.

Agenda item 7: Chief Executive's report

16. Mr Glyde reflected on the consultation meetings and the benefit of Authority members' involvement. He noted that drop-in sessions provided an opportunity for a greater range of views to be expressed at a greater level of detail. He noted the most effective engagement strategy varied by region and this would continue to be evaluated to ensure the MDBA could receive and take on board the views of the community most effectively. He noted the importance of having whole of government representation at community meetings, particularly from all relevant jurisdictional representatives.
17. Mr Glyde provided an update on the status of toolkit measures identified as part of the Northern Basin Review following a meeting with jurisdictions and Commonwealth agencies.
18. Mr Glyde updated the Authority on options being considered for regional office locations, the analysis undertaken and anticipated costs. He reported that the options analysis had not yet been finalised.
19. Mr Dreverman, Executive Director River Management, updated members on the possibility of restrictions around the use of the Barmah Choke and ongoing discussions with Murray Irrigation Limited.
20. Mr Dreverman also noted that there had been a 900 EC spike in salt levels in South Australia, generated in South Australia during the floods, which had now dissipated.
21. The Authority **noted** the updates from the Chief Executive.

Agenda item 8: Water resource planning update and planning position statements

22. Mr Russell James, Executive Director Policy and Planning, reported that the Warrego–Paroo–Nebine water resource plan (WRP) had been provided to the Deputy Prime Minister for his consideration. Mr James also provided an update on the state of WRPs and the work being undertaken to provide assistance to jurisdictions to ensure continued progress.
23. The Authority members discussed position statement 3F, particularly the assumption that the longer term volume of water available during the life of a WRP would not change until the WRP was reviewed. It was clarified that changes to the volume of water available would be the subject of consideration when water resource plans were reviewed, taking into account any changes as the result of climate change or other factors.
24. Members also discussed the possible short-form assessments, including that the MDBA had undertaken an assessment of the risk to the process and would provide further information on the range of issues identified.
25. The Authority:
 - (a) **noted** the update on the approach to development and assessment of water resource plans (WRPs)
 - (b) **noted** the status of WRP development
 - (c) **endorsed** the WRP Position Statement 3F – Limits on certain forms of take
 - (d) **noted** the WRP Position Statement 3D – Changes to baseline diversion limits had been withdrawn and was under further consideration
 - (e) **noted** the invitation to attend the 4th Annual Water Planners Forum in Brisbane.

Agenda item 9: 2017 Evaluation

26. Mr Colin Mues, Chief Economist, via teleconference, outlined the key elements of the 2017 Evaluation Plan and welcomed comments. He noted that some important data would not be available until November/December 2017 and this would mean publication would not be likely before March 2018.
27. He commented that the recent community consultations would inform the 2017 Evaluation. There would be further, phased, community consultation, including initially clarifying the scope of the work and the expectations of communities. A subsequent consultation phase would share and test available data and initial interpretations before a final stage which would test recommendations with stakeholders.
28. Authority members encouraged the inclusion of a value for money assessment of water recovery programs and the need to assess the environment and questions likely to be raised at that time of the release of the Evaluation.
29. Members were advised that in addition to the BCC and Advisory Committee on Social Economic and Environmental Sciences (ACSEES) communities would be given the opportunity to review and comment on the data.
30. Noting the requirement for the Productivity Commission to review the effectiveness of implementation of the Basin Plan in 2018, members were advised the MDBA was engaging with the Commission to discuss the 2017 Evaluation and how it might inform both the Commission's assessment of the National Water Initiative (due in 2017), or the review of Basin Plan implementation in 2018.
31. The Authority **agreed**:
 - (a) to the proposed approach for the 2017 Evaluation

- (b) to hold a workshop in May 2017 to consider the initial findings of the 2017 Evaluation and that additional workshops be held, as required, in the second part of the year
- (c) that the MDBA would draw on the independent evaluations which have already been done where feasible, and liaise closely with those doing further work in this area.

Agenda Item 10: Sustainable diversion limit accounting quarterly update

- 32. Mr Tony McLeod, General Manager, Water Policy, provided an update on progress of sustainable diversion limit (SDL) accounting and advised that an approach for determining the environmental water adjustment during the transition period to 2019 had been agreed with all the states.
- 33. He also informed the Authority of the progressive implementation of the New South Wales revised floodplain harvesting policy, including improved modelling, and that it was likely to require the MDBA to consider increasing the estimated baseline diversion limits.
- 34. The Authority:
 - (a) **requested** a presentation to the next meeting that further explains SDL accounting
 - (b) **noted** progress in sustainable diversion limits accounting and preparation for implementing SDLs from July 2019
 - (c) **noted** the expected increase in estimated baseline diversion limits arising from New South Wales floodplain harvesting policy.

Agenda item 11: Basin Plan amendment update

- 35. The Chair noted that an extension of time for the provision of submissions on the proposed amendments to the Basin Plan (Northern Basin Review, groundwater SDL changes and minor amendments) had been announced on 3 February 2016, bringing the deadline to 24 February 2017.
- 36. Ms Vicki Woodburn, General Manager, Partnerships and Engagement provided the Authority with an update on the progress of the consultation and submissions process.
- 37. Mr Brent Williams, General Manager, Basin Plan Amendment, via teleconference, advised the Authority on the next steps to progress the Basin Plan amendments. He noted that the extension of time should not affect the amendment process timeline, commenting that a number of external processes outside the MDBA's control could affect whether the June deadline was met.
- 38. The Authority **noted**:
 - (a) the update on consultation and submissions on the Basin Plan amendment
 - (b) next steps to progress the proposed amendment.

Agenda item 12: Sustainable diversion limit adjustment update

- 39. Dr Peta Derham, General Manager, Eco-Hydrology Analysis, via teleconference, updated the Authority on the progress of the SDL adjustment mechanism, including recent Basin Officials Committee and Council of Australian Governments outcomes and modelling progress.
- 40. She outlined the critical SDLAM projects that would be required to lead to a saving of greater than 600 GL and how they could be achieved.
- 41. Dr Derham advised that the natural cues project had been renamed the *Enhanced Environmental Water Delivery: hydrologic cues and relaxed constraints*.

42. Mr Carl Binning, Executive Director, Environmental Management, reported that an expert panel had been established by New South Wales and Victoria following the previous Ministerial Council meeting and that MDBA officials had attended several meetings at the request of the expert panel to provide advice and answer questions.
43. Among other issues, the expert panel was to look at the limits of change and their scientific basis. Dr Derham noted that the MDBA had previously advised BOC that the limits of change were open for future review and that the Lower Lakes and Coorong indicators had a high level of rigour behind them.
44. Mr James reported that the MDBA had met with New South Wales the previous week to work through its prerequisite policy measure proposal. When the assessment was completed it would be brought to the Authority for consideration.
45. The Authority **noted** the update on the sustainable diversion limit adjustment mechanism.

Agenda item 13: Other business

46. There were no other items of business.

Agenda item 14: Next meeting

47. The Authority **confirmed** that the next meeting of the Authority would be held in Canberra on Tuesday 7 March 2017.
48. Members adjourned to formally launch Mr Chris Guest's book, *Sharing the water – 100 years of River Murray politics*, and to take the opportunity for members to replicate the photo on the steps of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Offices, which was taken 100 years ago with the original Murray River Commissioners.
49. The meeting closed at 1 pm.