



Australian Government



Basin Plan amendments Minor practical changes

This snapshot provides an insight into the proposed Basin Plan amendments. There are two more snapshots available, covering the themes of groundwater and the northern basin review.

The Murray-Darling Basin Plan aims to safeguard one of Australia's key national assets, the Murray-Darling Basin. The basin covers more than one million square kilometres, provides water to almost three million Australians, houses 40 percent of Australia's farms and generates around \$19.4 billion annually from agricultural produce. It is also home to more than 46 species of native fish and 98 species of waterbirds.

The Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) is the agency responsible for establishing the Basin Plan in consultation with state and Commonwealth governments, industries and communities. The MDBA has a role in implementing, monitoring and adapting the Plan.

Basin Plan amendments

Minor practical changes

Snapshot

- The Murray–Darling Basin Plan is about ensuring a healthy and productive system for future generations.
- The MDBA, in consultation with basin state governments, has identified a range of minor improvements that would enable a practical and consistent implementation of the Basin Plan. In addition, changes to the *Water Act 2007* (Cwth) made mid-2016 require some minor amendments to the Basin Plan to ensure the legislation is consistent.
- This snapshot aims to summarise the practical changes being proposed for the Basin Plan. These proposed amendments include:
 - boundary changes to align better with state boundaries
 - giving basin states extra time to specify the allocation of their shared water recovery targets
 - changes to the ACT's baseline diversion limit to reflect current water recovery
 - changes to compliance on sustainable diversion limits in certain circumstances
 - minor changes to water trading rules to provide more clarity
 - minor changes to the Basin Plan following changes to the *Water Act 2007*.
- These proposed amendments to the Basin Plan are open for public comment from 22 November 2016 to 24 February 2017. Any member of the public can make a submission in relation to what is being proposed.

The proposed amendments

As the Basin Plan came into effect it was recognised there were a number of practical changes that could be made to make the roll out of the Basin Plan consistent and more effective.

Boundary changes

Water Resource Plan boundaries

Since the Basin Plan was made in 2012, a number of basin state governments have refined the boundaries of their own water planning areas. The state governments have requested that the MDBA change the Basin Plan water resource plan boundaries to align them with the state water planning boundaries. The change will see the total number of water planning areas decrease from 36 to 33.

Surface water boundaries

The MDBA is also proposing boundary changes to surface water catchments. These changes are to better align the surface water SDL resource unit boundaries to state arrangements and do not change any of the SDL's.

Sustainable diversion limit resource unit shared reduction amount

The Basin Plan currently sets out a default method for allocating the shared reduction target amount among catchments in the shared reduction zones. Shared reduction targets are water recovery targets that make up the rest of water recovery on top of local reduction targets.

The MDBA is proposing amendments to allow the basin state governments additional time to nominate the allocation of the shared reduction amount across SDL resource units.

The MDBA is proposing to give states an additional 12 months (until 30 June 2017) to request a distribution of the shared reduction amount that is different to the default distribution currently provided for in the Basin Plan. The MDBA believes

extending this time will enable further time to consider where state governments would prefer to see water recovery occur in their state.

Revised estimate of baseline diversion limit

Under the Basin Plan a term was established to determine required reductions in diversions of water. The Basin Plan refers to this as the baseline diversion limit (BDL).

The ACT has met its contribution to the Living Murray with the recovery of 2 gigalitres (GL) per year from outside of the ACT. To avoid double accounting this water, an amendment has been proposed to better describe the BDL and reflect these arrangements.

Method for determining compliance with the sustainable diversion limits

Under the Basin Plan if a state is in debit in regards to surface water recovery, by 20% or more, it is required to provide a reasonable excuse as to why it hasn't met that target.

The proposed amendment applies to the cumulative balance on the register of take for surface water. The amendment adjusts the cumulative balance on the register of take to allow for the annual removal of any debits, which are incurred in the previous water accounting period as a result of a particular circumstance that is considered beyond the state or territory government's control.

Water trading rules

The MDBA is proposing to amend the Basin Plan water trading rules to improve clarity.

The Basin Plan water trading rules came into effect on 1 July 2014. In implementing the water trading rules, the MDBA has identified a small number of rules that may benefit from clarification to ensure they operate in the manner that was originally intended. The changes aim to clarify definitions without changing the overall operation of the water trading rules.

The Authority obtained advice from the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission in preparing these proposed amendments as required by the *Water Act 2007*.

Consequential amendments following the Water Act review

The MDBA is proposing amendments to the Basin Plan in response to changes to the *Water Act 2007* which were made in 2016, following an independent review.

The proposed amendments update some reporting requirements in the Basin Plan, re-phase the timing of reviews and fix a minor cross-reference to the *Water Act*.

The proposed changes include:

- annual reporting on the Basin Plan will be separate to the MDBA's annual report
- reporting to the Murray–Darling Ministerial Council on impacts of the Basin Plan, reviews of water quality and salinity targets, and the environmental watering plan will be deferred until 2020
- a review on social and economic impacts of the Basin Plan will be included as part of the monitoring and evaluation program
- an assessment of the MDBA's monitoring, evaluation and reporting capabilities is to be rescheduled from 2017 to 2020 to align with other reviews.

Water Resource Plan requirements

The Basin Plan sets out what material must be contained in water resource plans for them to be accredited.

The MDBA is proposing minor amendments to the Basin Plan to simplify how this material is compiled by basin state governments.

These changes aim to reduce duplication and the potential for errors and inconsistencies.

More information

Underpinning this proposed Basin Plan amendment is substantial background research and materials from reviews of groundwater. These can be found on the MDBA website mdba.gov.au and include:

- legal materials outline proposed amendments
- relevant peer reviews

You can also contact us on 1800 230 067 or by email engagement@mdba.gov.au and we will do our best to answer your questions. The website will be regularly updated with frequently asked questions.

Next steps

The *Water Act 2007* requires that any changes the MDBA proposes to the Basin Plan requires a minimum eight week public consultation. The MDBA invites submissions from interested parties to provide feedback or to support the proposed changes to the Basin Plan.

Formal submissions can be received up until **5pm (AEST) 24 February 2017.**

To make a submission visit our website
mdba.gov.au/BPamendments

You can also send an email to
submissions@mdba.gov.au

or post a submission to:

Basin Plan Amendment Submissions
Murray–Darling Basin Authority
GPO BOX 2256
CANBERRA ACT 2601

After all submissions are received, they will be reviewed and a report will be drafted. The MDBA will finalise any proposed amendments and make a recommendation to the Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources.

Once the Minister makes a decision the amendments will be tabled in parliament.

Key terms

Sustainable diversion limit — regulate the amount of water that can be used for consumptive purposes in the basin.

Local reduction amount — the amount of water that is required to be recovered by each catchment to satisfy local environmental needs.

Shared reduction amount — further reduction required, in addition to the local reduction amounts, to satisfy the environmental needs of the Barwon–Darling River in the northern basin and the River Murray in the southern basin.

Baseline diversion limit — the diversion limit for consumptive use associated with, generally, 2009 conditions as if they were in place over the period 1895 to 2009.