



Australian Government



# Basin Plan

## FACT SHEET: THE BASIN PLAN CONCEPT STATEMENT

INTRODUCING THE KEY ELEMENTS AND APPROACH BEING TAKEN TO DEVELOP THE BASIN PLAN

The Basin Plan will be a strategic plan for the integrated and sustainable management of water resources in the Murray–Darling Basin. The Murray–Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) will prepare the plan, as required by the *Water Act 2007* (Cwlth).

### WHEN AND HOW THE BASIN PLAN WILL BE DEVELOPED

MDBA is working to a timetable that will produce a proposed Basin Plan by mid-2010, and the first Basin Plan in 2011.

The Basin Plan will be based on the best and latest scientific, social, cultural and economic knowledge, evidence and analysis. In preparing the plan, the Murray–Darling Basin Authority will consult extensively with Basin state and territory governments, key stakeholders, and rural and regional communities across the Basin. In future, the plan will be reviewed and revised, and will continue to evolve as it is implemented and as new information and knowledge becomes available.

MDBA is committed to producing a range of informative materials to promote understanding of, and input to, the Basin Plan. A series of position papers and issues papers will be released for government, for environmental, industry and Indigenous groups, and for other interested people.

The proposed Basin Plan will be published on the MDBA website, together with a 'plain English' summary.

*The Basin Plan: a concept statement* introduces the key elements and approach being taken by MDBA to develop the Basin Plan.

### KEY POINTS FROM THE CONCEPT STATEMENT

#### Managing the Murray–Darling Basin

Australia is entering a new era in water management and environmental protection. For the first time, the surface water, groundwater and environmental resources of the national heartland, the Murray–Darling Basin, will

be managed as a whole, according to a single, legally enforceable plan — the Basin Plan. This is planning at a scale and complexity that has never been undertaken anywhere else in the world.

The Basin Plan will seek to protect and restore key environmental assets and key ecosystem functions which are essential to the life of the rivers and their surrounding landscapes, human activities and cultural values. The Basin Plan must take into account the impact of this protection.

#### Purpose of the Basin Plan

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.

The Basin Plan will provide the foundation for managing the Basin's water resources in a way that can be sustained through time and in the national interest.

#### What will be in the Basin Plan

The Basin Plan will describe the Basin's surface water and ground water resources and explain how they are currently used by industry, environment and all communities, including Indigenous communities, across the Basin.

The Basin Plan will be based on the best and latest scientific, cultural and economic knowledge, evidence and analysis.

The central legal requirement of the Basin Plan is to set environmentally sustainable limits on the amount of water that can be taken from the Basin's water resources into the future. This limit is the Sustainable Diversion Limit (SDL).

A Basin-wide approach to the trading of water rights is another important element of the Basin Plan.

The Basin Plan will identify key environmental assets and ecosystem functions of water resources that must be protected. It will also identify risks to the condition or continued availability of Basin water resources and provide strategies for managing those risks.

#### **Sustainable diversion limits (SDLs)**

The sustainable diversion limits (SDLs) will take into account the 'precautionary principle', as well as the best available science. According to the precautionary principle, if there are threats of serious or irreversible environmental damage, lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent environmental degradation.

SDLs will limit the quantity of surface water and groundwater that may be taken from the Basin water resources as a whole. There will also be SDLs to limit the quantity of surface water and groundwater that can be taken from individual water resource plan areas and particular parts of water resource plan areas within the Basin. These areas will be defined in the Basin Plan and will draw upon current state water resource plan areas.

#### **Environmental watering plan**

The environmental watering plan will restore and sustain the wetlands and other environmental assets of the Basin and protect biodiversity dependent on the Basin water resources. This plan will safeguard existing environmental water, plan the recovery of additional water, and coordinate the use of environmental water across the Basin.

#### **Water quality and salinity management plan**

The water quality and salinity management plan aims to improve water quality and reduce salinity impacts across the Basin. This plan will identify the main causes of poor water quality in the Murray–Darling Basin and will set water quality and salinity objectives and targets for the Basin water resources.

#### **Water trading rules**

The Basin Plan is required to include water trading rules, which will ensure a Basin-wide approach to the trading of water rights, and improve the overall operational efficiency of trading water rights to promote more effective use of water.

Water trading rules will be prepared by MDBA based on advice from the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) and on stakeholder consultation.

#### **Social and economic analysis and implications**

The Basin Plan must describe the social and economic circumstances of Basin communities that depend on Basin water resources.

MDBA will develop the plan on the basis of a number of factors including socioeconomic analysis. This will include having regard to social, cultural, Indigenous and other public benefit issues.

MDBA will use the socioeconomic analysis to inform how, where and when water can be delivered to meet environmental requirements. Governments will use this information to consider appropriate responses to social and economic impacts of the Basin Plan.

#### **Relationship of state-based water resource plans to the Basin Plan**

The Basin states will play a major role in putting the Basin Plan into operation by developing and implementing water resource plans that are consistent with the Basin Plan. MDBA will also work together with the states in developing the Basin Plan.

As current state water resource plans expire and new ones are developed by the states, these will need to be accredited by the Commonwealth Minister under the Water Act. The Basin Plan will set out the requirements with which state water resource plans will need to comply in order to be accredited. MDBA will advise the Commonwealth Minister on whether individual water resource plans comply with the requirements of the Basin Plan.

### **FURTHER INFORMATION**

*The Basin Plan: a concept statement* is available on the Murray–Darling Basin Authority website:

[www.mdba.gov.au](http://www.mdba.gov.au)

For further information, contact the Murray–Darling Basin Authority via:

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**First published - June 2009**

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