

Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment Mechanism—Technical Workshop Outcomes

The second Technical Workshop for the Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment Mechanism (SDLAM) was held on March 5, 2020 in Canberra. The workshop provided an opportunity for technical experts from the Basin States to share information on the progress and technical aspects of their SDLAM projects.

The format of the workshop enabled participants to be updated on progress and to ask questions of the people involved in delivering those projects. This open exchange helped build people's understanding of the package of projects and strengthen confidence in the scientific integrity of these projects.

Roles and responsibilities in the SDLAM

State governments are responsible for delivering the SDLAM projects, including consulting with communities on design and implementation.

It is acknowledged that projects will evolve, adapt and change over time as the states move through their respective consultation, design and regulatory approval processes. This has meant that there has and will be changes to the business cases originally submitted by Basin state governments.

Updates from NSW, Victoria and South Australia

South Australia and Victoria both presented a broader scale overview of their projects, that focused on floodplain watering of high value wetlands.

South Australia provided an overview of its five SDLAM projects (excluding *The Living Murray and Enhanced Environmental Water Delivery projects*). The focus of their update was on work to date on the *South Australian Floodplain Integrated Infrastructure Program* - on the Pike (now in operation) and Katarapko Floodplains. The other South Australian SDLAM projects are also progressing well.

Victoria provided an update on the work to date on the *Victorian Murray Floodplain Restoration Project*. This is a suite of nine SDLAM projects that when implemented, will deliver water to key Victorian floodplains from Lindsay and Wallpolla Islands in the west of the state to Gunbower National Park and Guttrum-Benwell Forest further upstream near Kerang.

These projects are progressing into the detailed design phase.

Both South Australia and Victoria reflected on the importance of community consultation and governance arrangements, as well as lessons learnt through the Works and Measures projects delivered under The Living Murray (TLM) in designing and implementing their projects.

New South Wales held roundtable discussions on its four key SDLAM project areas: Yanco Creek, Menindee Lakes Water Savings Project, the mid-Murray National Parks and the NSW Constraints projects.

While there have been significant delays to the NSW projects, progress is being made. In each discussion, NSW representatives reinforced their commitment to implementing the SDLAM projects but noted the risk that these projects may need to be significantly modified from the original business case.

See more information including the presentations made by each state at <https://getinvolved.mdba.gov.au/technical-workshop-sdlam>

What is the Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment Mechanism?

The SDL Adjustment Mechanism was built into the Basin Plan to provide flexibility. Adjusting the SDLs is a key step in implementing the Basin Plan.

See more about the Sustainable Diversions Limit Adjustment Mechanism including full list of projects and reconciliation at <https://www.mdba.gov.au/basin-plan-roll-out/sustainable-diversion-limits/sdlam>

The SDLAM supply projects are designed to achieve the equivalent environmental outcomes that 605 GL of water would achieve. This 605 GL water will remain in the system for other users, including communities, industry and agriculture. The focus of this work is in the southern connected Basin, meaning the area that covers the water resources shared by NSW, Victoria and South Australia. The 36 supply projects were nominated by Basin state governments and endorsed by the Basin Officials Committee. These projects include environmental works and/or changes to river operating rules, which will achieve environmental outcomes, with less water.

However, all the SDLAM projects share the common goal of enabling improved environmental outcomes without further reducing the amount of water available in the consumptive pool – that is water for industry or human needs.

The MDBA will continue to monitor and support the processes undertaken by the states. If the MDBA deems it necessary, the MDBA will undertake a *reconciliation* to ensure that the package of supply projects has delivered the expected equivalent environmental outcomes.

Outcomes, feedback and next steps

Workshop participants were invited to provide feedback and reflections on the day. Feedback was constructive, productive and respectful. In summary, participants noted that there was goodwill and interest in participating in these workshops.

Participants felt that there was room for significant improvement in stakeholder engagement both at a program, and individual project level, particularly in relation to Traditional Owners. Traditional Owners expect to be involved in how the SDLAM projects are designed, implemented and monitored.

Stakeholders expressed a desire to participate in regular and coordinated updates on project and program progress, to increase transparency. Future forums should consider a consistent reporting approach across all projects (i.e. cultural, social, economic impacts, and project and over overall program progress).

The next Technical update will be held by the end of March 2021.