



Australian Government



# FACT SHEET Managing Australia's water resources

## An overview of Australian Government agencies, programs, roles and responsibilities

The Murray–Darling Basin incorporates Australia's three longest rivers and is one of our most diverse regions, stretching from Queensland to South Australia.

The Murray–Darling Basin is very important to Australia economically, socially and environmentally. Often called Australia's food bowl, the Murray–Darling Basin has a population of approximately 2 million people and supports much of Australia's agriculture and agricultural exports. The Basin also contains more than 30,000 wetlands, including 16 internationally significant sites, many of which provide habitat for migratory birds.

However, water use in the Basin has increased five-fold in the last century. The Basin is now under significant stress from the combined impacts of over-allocation of water, severe drought, and the early impacts of climate change.

There has been a marked decline in river health and it has become imperative to take action to return the system to a sustainable footing.

This fact sheet outlines Murray–Darling Basin Authority's responsibilities in the context of national water resource management.

The Australian Government is working with all states, territories and communities to improve the way we manage Australia's water resources. As we prepare for a future with less water it is important that we improve water use and infrastructure, and restore the health of our rivers.

To help with this, the Australian Government has passed legislation and established the following initiatives and programs. Several Australian Government agencies are working together to help deliver this package of water reforms.

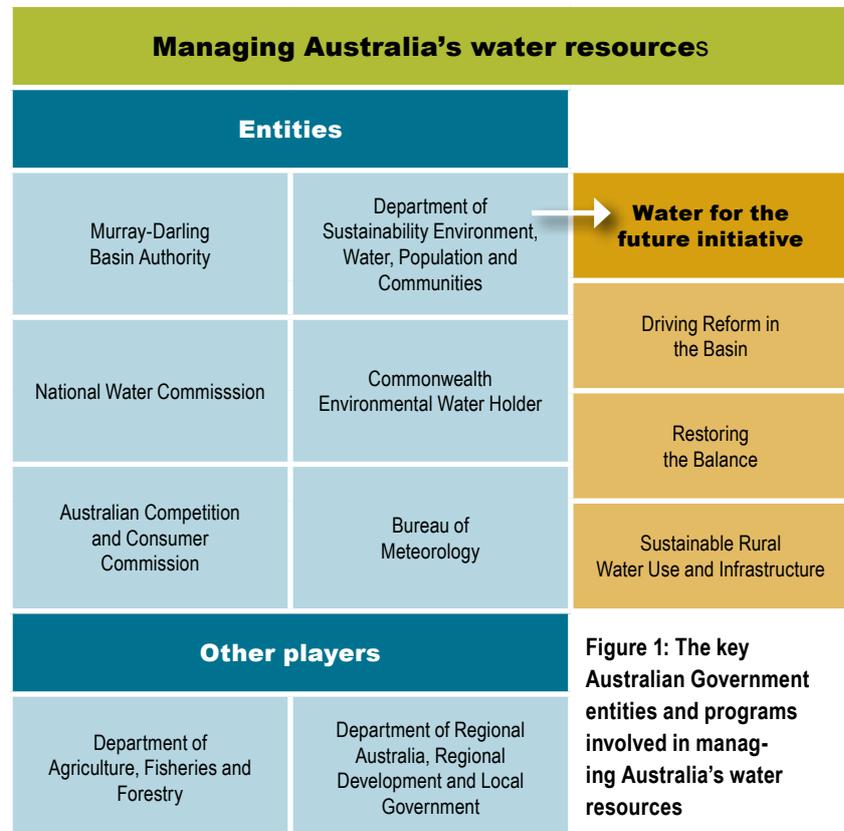


Figure 1: The key Australian Government entities and programs involved in managing Australia's water resources

## National Water Initiative (NWI)

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

The NWI is the blueprint for water reform across Australia. This agreement between all states and territory governments and the Commonwealth has been in place since 2004. The NWI represents a shared commitment by all our governments to increase the efficiency of Australia's water use and includes commitments to reform water markets and trading, and deal with over-allocated or stressed water systems.

## The Water Act

The Australian Government passed the *Water Act* in 2007 to help implement the National Water Initiative. The *Water Act* introduced new powers that help the Australian Government coordinate a national approach to water management and meet the challenges facing water management in the Murray–Darling Basin. Importantly, the *Water Act* established the Murray–Darling Basin Authority to prepare a Basin Plan for the sustainable management of water across the whole of the Murray–Darling Basin.

## Murray–Darling Basin Authority (MDBA)

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

The objective of the Murray–Darling Basin Authority (in partnership with governments and communities) is to put water use on a sustainable footing to ensure vibrant communities, a viable irrigation industry, secure water for cities and towns, and to restore the health of the environment of the Basin.

The Basin Plan will:

- set legally enforceable environmentally sustainable limits on the quantities of surface and ground water that may be taken from Basin water resources
- set Basin-wide environmental, water quality and salinity objectives
- develop efficient water trading regimes across the Basin
- set requirements for state water resource plans
- improve water security for all Basin water uses.

MDBA is responsible for preparing a management plan (the Basin Plan) that will include a new sustainable diversion limit (SDL) in the Murray–Darling Basin to ensure enough water is allocated to the environment to maintain important ecosystems and river health.

In preparing the Basin Plan, MDBA is using the best scientific and socio-economic information available. A formal public consultation period will allow for comment on the draft Basin Plan in 2011. MDBA is engaging with the communities, and industries and governments around the Murray–Darling Basin.

MDBA also manages the Murray River system in close cooperation with state authorities to ensure reliable water supplies for all users. Further, MDBA implements programs that support the restoration of the environment in the Murray–Darling Basin, such as the Native Fish Strategy, and The Living Murray river restoration program.

## Water for the Future Initiative

[www.environment.gov.au/water/](http://www.environment.gov.au/water/)

The Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (SEWPaC) implements the Water for the Future initiative. This ten-year, multi billion dollar program, aims to secure the water supply for all Australians. Water for the Future has four priorities:

- using water wisely
- supporting healthy rivers
- taking action on climate change
- securing water supplies.

Important elements of Water for the Future are investing in water infrastructure to make our water use more efficient; buying back water from willing sellers (using it to meet core environmental needs); and supporting other reforms.

## Driving Reform in the Basin program

The Driving Reform in the Basin program supports Australian Government contributions to the operation and water reform functions of MDBA, including those under the Water Act. This program also gives the National Water Commission (NWC) and Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) specific roles and functions under the Water Act which are outlined further below.

## Sustainable Rural Water Use and Infrastructure program

The Australian Government is also investing \$5.8 billion in modernising irrigation infrastructure and improving water use efficiency.

The Restoring the Balance in the Murray–Darling Basin program and the Sustainable Rural Water Use and Infrastructure program are helping by returning water to the environment and in the transition to the implementation of the Basin Plan. Both programs are administered by SEWPaC.

## Restoring the Balance in the Murray–Darling Basin program

Under the \$3.1 billion Restoring the Balance in the Murray–Darling Basin program, the Australian Government is buying water entitlements to help restore the Murray–Darling Basin's environment.

## Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder

The Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder manages water purchased by the Australian Government for environmental purposes across Australia. This water will be used to protect and restore key environmental sites, including the health of rivers and wetlands in the Murray–Darling Basin.

## National Water Commission (NWC)

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

NWC was established to oversee implementation of the National Water Initiative and report on progress to the Australian Government. All state and territory governments have lodged plans for how they will implement the National Water Initiative's requirements. The National Water Commission will also be responsible for auditing the effectiveness of the implementation of the Basin Plan and Water Resource Plans.

## Australian Competition And Consumer Commission (ACCC)

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

Under the Water Act, ACCC advises the Commonwealth Water Minister on water charge and water market rules. ACCC are advising MDBA on trading rules for inclusion in the Basin Plan.

## Bureau Of Meteorology (The Bureau)

[www.bom.gov.au/water](http://www.bom.gov.au/water)

The Bureau has the responsibility, through the Water Act, for compiling and delivering consistent water information across all of Australia. The Bureau's functions include:

- conducting regular national water resources assessments
- publishing an annual National Water Account
- providing regular water availability forecasts.

