

RIVER REACH



Australian Government



August 2020

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A message from Chief Executive, Phillip Glyde



Welcome to our August 2020 edition of *River Reach*. This year has been extraordinary on so many fronts with bushfires and the disruption caused by the global pandemic. Basin communities have continued to show remarkable resilience despite the unparalleled economic and health challenges we are all facing. Our thoughts are particularly with those impacted most heavily by increased restrictions and regions where communities have literally been cut in half by the closure of state borders.

The welcome rain this week would have brought relief to some of our stakeholders, particularly in light of our [Annual Operating Outlook](#) indicating that existing soil moisture, coupled with forecast continued rain is cause for cautious optimism. As always, river managers continue to operate the system as effectively and efficiently as possible.

Here at the Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) we have this month warmly [welcomed](#) retired Air Chief Marshal, Sir Angus Houston AK, AFC (Ret'd) as the [Chair](#) of our Authority for the next four years. Sir Angus served for six years as the Chief of the Defence Force and four years as Chief of Air Force. He is well regarded as a visionary leader with experience across the public service, academia and charitable organisations. His extensive experience in bringing different interests together to work towards a common goal, means he is well placed to lead the Authority for the next stage of implementation. It is a significant honour to have someone of Sir Angus' calibre appointed to chair the Authority and we are looking forward to working constructively with him for the benefit of all. To find out more about his remit and goals you can listen to him discussing the new role on [ABC Radio National](#).

I am also pleased to acknowledge the efforts of the NSW Government in delivering the final nine water resource plans to the MDBA. This means we now have water resource plans for the entire Basin. The MDBA will assess these final water resource plans before providing advice to the Commonwealth Minister responsible for water, The Hon Keith Pitt MP, for an accreditation decision.

Last month we [welcomed](#) the release of the much anticipated Australian Competition and Consumer Commission's (ACCC) [interim report](#). The ACCC was tasked by the Australian Government in August 2019 to recommend options to improve markets for tradeable water rights, including options to enhance their operations, transparency, regulation, competitiveness and efficiency. We agree that more transparency and better regulation of water markets is needed—our own audits have shown this, so it is great to see this reflected in the ACCC's work. We will be carefully looking at the issues identified in the report as far as they affect the Basin Plan and the management of the River Murray. The ACCC is currently [seeking feedback](#) on its interim findings and recommendations, with the final report due to the Australian Government for consideration at the end of November 2020.

I hope you enjoy this issue of River Reach. Please know that we value our stakeholders and encourage you to reach out if you need more information. Thank you for your ongoing interest and stay safe.

Listen here - Monitoring compliance with Australia's largest water reform



Murray-Darling Basin Authority
Interview with Dan Blacker – MDBA

4:30



General Manager, MDBA Office of Compliance, Daniel Blacker in Moulamein, NSW

Basin communities see a direct relationship between compliance, trust and confidence in the Basin Plan, so the MDBA's Office of Compliance is of critical importance. [Listen](#) to the Head of the Office of Compliance, Daniel Blacker outline the priorities and challenges for 2020–21.

Annual operating outlook more optimistic for 2020-21 water year



Each year, the MDBA releases an [Annual Operating Outlook](#) that explains how the MDBA may operate the River Murray system across a range of possible climate and rainfall scenarios to assist water users and river managers. River managers are cautiously optimistic that 2020–21 will be a better year than 2019–2020 because catchments are primed after a wet autumn, there is more water in storage and the [Bureau of Meteorology](#) is forecasting higher than average spring rainfall.

MDBA Executive Director of River Management, Andrew Reynolds, said the river is a dynamic environment so planning ahead will assist river operators in identifying and managing risks to river operations and water supply. This includes the ongoing risk of a [delivery shortfall](#), where demand outstrips the ability to move water through the system. The Outlook considers the shortfall risk to be greatest in late summer and autumn under ‘moderate’ or ‘near-average’ rainfall scenarios, due to the Barmah Choke, inter-valley trade constraints and other limitations on the system’s capacity to meet the anticipated demand for water.

"While we hope for good rain, as river managers we need to plan for a range of conditions—nobody knows for sure what the weather will bring. If conditions revert to a drier scenario, we need to be ready for it, so we continue to operate the system as effectively and efficiently as possible", Mr Reynolds said.

The River Murray System Annual Operating Outlook is prepared by the MDBA with input from the Australian Government and the New South Wales, Victorian and South Australian governments. An update will be published at the end of October 2020 following the normal winter-spring inflow period when there will be a clearer picture of water availability.

Watch our new animation - managing the Basin's water resources



Climate is a key factor in the availability of water in the Murray-Darling Basin, and how it is managed. River managers take account of the Basin's very different climatic regions and ecosystems in their decision-making, while understanding that the Basin as a whole forms one interconnected system, with complex drivers of climate and rainfall that all influence each other.

Building regulating structures on the Basin's rivers has helped to manage these limited water resources and ensure a more reliable supply for human consumption and agriculture. For more information on the Basin's climate watch our new [video](#).

Keeping connections alive



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"Keeping Our Water Spirits and Our Connections Alive"



Yewenyl at the English language Wikipedia / CC BY-SA

Our partners the Northern Basin Aboriginal Nations (NBAN) have a new website

The Northern Basin Aboriginal Nations (NBAN) recently launched its new [website](#). NBAN is a not-for-profit organisation that represents, advocates for and empowers First Nations in water management, in the northern Murray-Darling Basin.

Since 2009, through the cultural authority of its member Nations, NBAN has been providing strategic advice on First Nations' vision of "keeping our water spirits and connections alive". NBAN is also dedicated to improving its Nations' spiritual, cultural, environmental, social and economic conditions. NBAN's new website provides up-to-date information about the organisation and its activities, plus is a repository of useful information including projects, Cultural Flows literature, newsletters, events, and resources including relevant legislation and reports. Visit nban.org.au.

Water for the environment 2020-2021 priorities

Water for the environment is used to improve the health of our rivers, wetlands and floodplains. Providing water for the environment helps to achieve the vision of a healthy Murray–Darling river system for the benefit of the communities that rely upon it. To help achieve this vision, the MDBA publishes annual environmental watering priorities for the Basin. These identify where water for the environment can be best used across the Basin each year.

[The 2020-21 Basin annual watering priorities](#) indicate that environmental water will be used strategically to protect our wetlands, floodplains and river ecosystems from further damage, and place them in the best possible position to recover from the drought when it breaks. The focus will be on avoiding permanent loss of species or ecosystems, providing drought refuges for animals and fish and supporting breeding events where they occur naturally. The [Commonwealth Environmental Water Office](#) has also released its [Water Management Plan for 2020-21](#), which reflects the importance of water for the environment in supporting native fish and bird breeding across the next 12 months.

For the first time, objectives and benefits experienced by First Nations people from the delivery of environmental water on Country are included in the Basin watering priorities. Over 2019–20 the MDBA and Commonwealth Environmental Water Office partnered with the Northern Basin Aboriginal Nations and the Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations. This partnership was designed to share information, collaborate and integrate First Nations' outcomes directly into current water management practices, including the Basin annual watering priorities. The [Victorian Environmental Water Holder](#) has also released its [Seasonal Watering Plan 2020-2021](#). This document sets out when and where water for the environment is planned to be delivered under a range of climate scenarios in Victoria.

Healthy Coorong, Healthy Basin



The Coorong is an important location for all Australians

Community members have had their say on future infrastructure options to support the recovery of South Australia's iconic Coorong. This consultation, part of the Australian and South Australian governments' [Healthy Coorong, Healthy Basin](#) program, assessed the environmental, social and cultural benefits and potential impacts of a range of long-term management solutions to improve flows to the Coorong.

The initial phase saw First Nations and the local community providing input into what criteria should be used to assess these potential infrastructure solutions and what other options could be considered. The agreed criteria were then used to inform the next phase which involved a further survey and series of online workshops where a range of experts answered questions from the community to help flesh out the options against these criteria.

Outcomes from these phases were discussed at length with the Coorong Partnership representative group and it is expected that the program will be able to confirm which options will now progress to detailed feasibility investigations shortly.

Keep an eye on the South Australian [Department for Environment and Water](#).

River Ops Weekly Report and Drought Update



River Murray Weekly Report

The weekly report provides updates on operations, river flows, storage inflows, gauge levels, rainfall and salinity data.



Murray-Darling Basin Authority **Drought Update**

Each month we publish a drought update which includes rainfall and water quality information from across the Basin.



View and bookmark the drought update.

Subscribe for regular updates, find out more about rainfall, temperature, storages and condition outlook for the Basin.

Fish surveys provide answers



Releasing a tagged Murray cod into the water. Photo Bryce Halliday

This winter, fish scientists have been busy collecting data to help understand how river management is influencing fish movement and populations on the River Murray. Native fish species, including the iconic Murray cod and golden perch were caught using electrofishing, then measured and tagged, before being safely released back in to the water. Two distinct yet complementary projects took place in different parts of the River Murray.

Downstream of Mildura

[Two electrofishing teams](#) caught and then attached passive integrated transponder (PIT) tags to 571 golden perch, Murray cod and silver perch. Fish ranged in size from 120mm to 1.18m and were tagged during two separate five-day trips downstream of Mildura. The MDBA funded the two teams from Charles Sturt University and Ecology Australia and will use this information to:

- record distances moved and relate movements to factors like temperature and water releases
- investigate recolonisation of the Darling River by fish migrating from the River Murray, and
- gain valuable information as to why only a limited number of native fish are using the Lock 11 fishway.

PIT tagging these fish also allows the MDBA to monitor fish movement along the River Murray and assess the performance of the Sea to Hume fishways. Fish movement is a key lifecycle requirement of most Australian native fish species and a monitoring target under the Basin Plan

and Basin-wide Environmental Watering Strategy. The MDBA funded the Sea to Hume fishway program to improve connectivity and fish movement along 2000km of the River Murray.

Downstream of Yarrawonga

More than 1000 fish were captured, measured, and tagged thanks to a mid-June survey undertaken by five teams from electrofishing boats along a 40km stretch of the Murray, downstream of Yarrawonga. By tagging, releasing, and then re-capturing these fish in the future, researchers can track survival, movement over time, and how many are caught by anglers. 100 of the tagged fish were also fitted with PIT tags to detect when they move through fishways. The teams were from the Arthur Rylah Institute for Environmental Research from the Victorian Department of Environment, Water, Land and Planning and part of a long-term fish monitoring program along the Murray that's been happening for more than 20 years.

This huge set of data is very important and continues to provide insights into fish population dynamics, including how fish respond to the return of snags and river flow conditions.

Mobile phones have made it easier than ever for recreational fishers to contribute to fish research when they catch a tagged fish. If you catch a fish with a visible tag, record the tag details, take some photos of the fish and the tag, and return it to the water. Call the phone number on the tag and provide the details before you even head for home! You can see the science in action in this [video](#).

On the horizon

7 - 13 September 2020:

[National Landcare Week](#)

September 2020:

[National Biodiversity Month](#)

5 - 11 October 2020:

[Australian Wildlife Week](#)

19 - 25 October 2020:

[National Water Week](#)

The Murray-Darling Basin



The MDBA has offices in Adelaide, Albury-Wodonga, Canberra, Goondiwindi, Griffith, Mildura, Murray Bridge, Toowoomba and regional engagement officers around the Basin

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