

RIVER REACH



Australian Government



MURRAY-DARLING
BASIN AUTHORITY

June 2020

[Subscribe to River Reach, the MDBA's newsletter](#)

A message from Chief Executive, Phillip Glyde



Welcome to our June edition of River Reach. After a summer that was defined by extreme events, continuing drought punctuated by the devastating bushfires, we have seen a significant shift in climatic conditions which has brought the first decent rainfalls in more than 12 months.

The Bureau of Meteorology's Outlook for the year ahead is promising and many across the Basin should expect a wet winter. Because of the good autumn rains, winter crops like wheat, barley and canola are off to a strong start, and commodity forecasters are expecting a bumper summer. ABARES expects crop production to be 44.5 million tonnes this year, 10% above the 10-year average.

The Basin encompasses a complex network of people, industries and organisations with competing interests and therefore water needs to be managed carefully for future generations. The [Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council](#) is due to meet this week, to discuss some of these important cross-jurisdictional Basin policy issues, and I encourage you to keep an eye out for the communicate over the coming days.

The COVID-19 situation has been challenging for us all. For communities already battling from the lasting impacts of drought, the economic and health impacts of the pandemic have been an additional blow. I want reassure you that this situation has not slowed our progress on water reform and this quarter we have hosted meetings with our governance bodies including the [Murray-Darling Basin Authority](#), the [Advisory Committee on Social, Economic and Environmental Sciences \(ACSEES\)](#) and [Basin Community Committee \(BCC\)](#). These forums are critical to progressing our major initiatives and if you have not had a chance to read their communiques, I urge you to do so. Find out more about progress of water resource plans in this issue's [Basin Plan Report Card](#) story.

You may also be aware of the number of recent reviews into water management – including the [Interim Inspector General’s inquiry into the management of Murray–Darling Basin water resources](#) and the [Lower Lakes Science Review](#). These reviews have yielded key insights into how we can improve water management for the benefit for all. We expect further reviews to be released in the year ahead that will provide further valuable information.

These reviews provide key inputs into our focus areas for 2020–21, which include improved regulation, increasing transparency and ongoing adaptive management. Later this year, the Basin Plan is due for an [evaluation](#). The Basin Plan is evaluated every five years and examines each element of the Plan, including social, economic, cultural and environmental outcomes. We look forward to providing the information towards the end of the year.

The MDBA is committed to communicating more about water use in the Basin. We’ve recently published explainer information on how water can be used by entitlement holders — find out more about [how water is used](#).

This is just a fraction of the work that is being undertaken here at the MDBA in 2020. I hope you enjoy this edition of River Reach. We value hearing from our stakeholders, and if you would like further information on any topic, please do get in touch.

Thank you for your ongoing efforts and interest.

Basin Plan Report Card reveals steady progress, with more to do



Water resource plans

Status: Plans from Victoria, Queensland and South Australia are accredited and in place. Plans for the ACT have been assessed and have been recommended for accreditation.



Water recovery

Bridging the gap

Status: Targeted local and shared recovery needs to be fast-tracked to ensure compliance and conclude the program. Future water recovery should consider lessons learned from the original program, including the impact on Basin communities.



Compliance

Status: Consistent metering and transparent information about governance arrangements is required to build confidence in water regulation. Basin governments have protected the first flush following significant rainfall in the northern Basin. An evaluation of this event is underway.



Water resource plans (NSW)

Status: Plans were originally due 30 June 2019. NSW recently provided 11 groundwater plans to the MDBA for assessment. NSW has undertaken consultation on the remaining nine plans and agreed in April to submit all plans by 30 June 2020.



Sustainable diversion limit adjustment mechanism

Supply measures

Status: The complex and significant supply and constraints projects remain at risk. There is a high level of stakeholder concern with the major projects. Without implementation of all these projects by 2024, more water will need to be recovered.

Efficiency measures

Status: Only a very small amount of water has been recovered under this program, with little progress since the launch of the program in 2019 (1.9 GL/y as at March 2020).



Environmental water delivery

Status: Environmental water holders and Basin governments have used water strategically, on the back of recent rainfall to improve river health for everyone. Further transparency and improved communications are needed to provide communities with confidence that water for the environment is achieving outcomes.



Northern Basin initiatives

Status: Projects are at various stages, with some projects on track providing confidence to communities, while some projects are delayed. A clear approach to implementation is required and should be made publicly available.

Mid-Year Report Card

The six-monthly 'health check' released by the MDBA shows progress to implement the Murray–Darling Basin Plan has kept pace, with more action needed in the future to deliver important on-ground projects.

Despite a challenging start to 2020, the [June Mid-Year Report Card](#) reveals governments are on track with many of their commitments, but greater effort is needed to ensure agreed on-ground projects to modernise the way the river is managed are delivered as planned.

Of the 36 on-ground projects to modernise the river, 30 have progressed or are complete, while six are at significant risk of delay. All projects are due to be completed by 2024. These are significant, multi-million-dollar projects, that require extensive consultation with landholders and communities, but some projects have taken longer than originally expected.

While most of the water for the environment has been recovered, progress on the remaining 450GL by 2024 under the [sustainable diversion limit adjustment mechanism \(SDLAM\)](#) has been slow. Environmental water holders have used what water they have strategically, off the back of recent rains, to improve the river health.

Great efforts have been made in recent months by the states to complete their water resource plans. Plans are now operational in Victoria, South Australia and Queensland, while ACT's plans are expected to be in place ahead of the new water year, which begins on 1 July 2020. New South Wales' groundwater plans are currently being assessed and the New South Wales Government has agreed to provide surface water plans to the MDBA by the end of June.

The states are on track with their commitments in the [Basin Compliance Compact](#), but progress with metering and measuring water extracted in the northern Basin is slow and uneven. Robust and transparent compliance measures like metering and monitoring are key to building confidence that water users are doing the right thing and the states need to show more willingness to act in this area.

Overall the MDBA would like to congratulate governments and communities for the progress made since 2012 and the continued collaboration to ensure the Plan can be implemented for a sustainable and productive Basin.

Check out the latest [Basin Plan Report Card](#) for further information

Water Resource Plan Quarterly Report update



Water Resource Plans
mdba.gov.au/water-resource-plans

Update: June 2020

Water Resource Plan quarterly update

Read more on the status of water resource plans in the [MDBA's latest Quarterly Report](#).

Providing more transparency about water markets—
scoping study released

Murray–Darling Basin Water Market Products Scoping Study

Reference ID: SP002089

A Marsden Jacob Report

Murray–Darling Basin Water Market Products Scoping Study

A new report outlining what secondary products are available across water markets in the Murray–Darling Basin has been released. The [Murray–Darling Basin Water Market Products Scoping Study](#) commissioned by the Murray–Darling Basin Authority and released in May 2020, identifies and maps the existing and emerging secondary water market products available across the Murray–Darling Basin.

The report assesses uptake of products and coverage, while assessing options to increase transparency of information available to those who participate or want to participate in water markets.

Basin water markets are designed to support the movement of water assets to their highest value use—whether that is a seller seeking to maximise their returns on excess allocation, or a buyer looking to secure water to minimise crop cost inputs and maximise returns.

The scoping study identifies nine key findings which will be used to inform ongoing management of the Murray–Darling water markets. This information has been provided to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) to assist with its [Murray–Darling Basin water markets inquiry](#). The ACCC is due to provide an interim report to the Federal Treasurer by 30 June 2020.

[Read the full report](#), or for specific state related trading inquiries, please visit the relevant state website.

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.



The drought update is published fortnightly with the latest rainfall and water quality information from across the Basin.



Don't forget to bookmark this page

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

Water for the environment—new digital initiative reveals science behind environmental flows



Basin communities can now access and learn about the science behind how water for the environment is helping support a healthy Basin, with the launch of a new website.

[Flow-MER](#) is the [Commonwealth Environmental Water Office's](#) new on-ground monitoring, evaluation and research program website. It collects evidence on how water for the environment, held by the Commonwealth, is making a difference to the Basin's rivers, wetlands and floodplains.

The new website brings together the work of independent scientists from some of Australia's leading regional universities and research institutions, as well as the work of First Nations people, local water managers, communities and landholders.

The program is made up of two components:

- evaluation and research at a Basin scale
- site specific monitoring and research at seven selected areas across the Basin.

Monitoring and research undertaken at a local and Basin-wide scale informs the evaluation of water for the environment. The project provides the critical evidence needed to understand how water for the environment is helping to maintain, protect, and restore ecosystems and biodiversity across the Basin.

The website is a step towards improving transparency of decision-making. It offers people a way to engage with the scientists and see for themselves the science that is helping inform delivery of water for the environment, and what it is achieving. The program will demonstrate outcomes and inform management of Commonwealth water through to June 2022.

Flow-MER integrates and builds on five years of monitoring and research activities under the [Long-Term Intervention Monitoring \(LTIM\)](#) and [Environmental Water Knowledge and Research \(EWKR\)](#) projects (2014–2019).

Further information about the use and monitoring of Commonwealth Environmental Water can be found on the [Monitoring Evaluation and Research Program website](#).

Dewfish Demonstration Reach (Condamine) showing real results



Fish hotel being placed into Oakey Creek as part of the DDR Project

An innovative project based on partnerships between government, community and industry is resulting in positive outcomes and restoring native fish in the Dewfish Demonstration Reach. The [Dewfish Demonstration Reach \(DDR\)](#) is a joint government and community initiative demonstrating how incorporating science, adaptive management and stakeholder engagement can deliver real benefits for native fish.

The DDR is located near Dalby, Queensland, stretching through parts of Myall Creek, Oakey Creek and the Condamine River. The Dewfish Demonstration Reach (DDR) commenced back in 2007 and is focussed on recovering native fish facing a range of threats, including poor water quality, connectivity, loss of instream and riparian vegetation, instream habitat complexity, bank erosion and pest fish species.

The project has continued with ongoing support from the Australian Government, Basin state governments with strong support from community and industry groups. At the inception of the project, a robust monitoring program was initiated to evaluate the response of native fish to individual and cumulative rehabilitation activities. This information informed an adaptive management framework.

The response of native fish populations to the application of multiple intervention activities has been outstanding. At the intervention sites, abundances of large-bodied native fish species increased significantly (up to 20-fold) for species such as Golden Perch, Eel-tailed Catfish, Murray Cod, Spangled Perch, and Bony Bream. Rehabilitation of bankside and instream vegetation also resulted in significant increases (up to 100-fold) in small-bodied native fish as well, including species such as Carp Gudgeon and Murray–Darling Rainbowfish. Hyrtl’s Catfish (Moonfish) have also returned to the reach for the first time in many years.

The DDR has inspired the community and landholders within the Condamine River catchment to become more interested in restoring their local waterways and provided them with the tools to be able to do it.

The DDR project supplements and helps build on efforts that support native fish across the Basin, with a coordinated approach to recovery. The Australian Government has joined with Basin state governments to develop a new [Native Fish Recovery Strategy](#) which is set for release in coming weeks to continue this focus on recovering native fish across the Murray–Darling Basin.

On the horizon

5 - 12 July 2020:

[NAIDOC Week](#)

2 August 2020:

[National Tree Day](#)

15 - 23 August:

[National Science Week](#)

17 - 23 August 2020:

[Keep Australia Beautiful 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

1800 230 067

engagement@mdba.gov.au

[Unsubscribe](#) from the MDBA River Reach stakeholder newsletter.

