

# RIVER REACH



Australian Government



February 2019

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## Welcome to the first edition of *River Reach*

MDBA Chief Executive,  
Phillip Glyde

We've heard from you. We know you want to hear directly from us about what's going on in the Murray-Darling Basin. I'm pleased to launch the first edition of our monthly stakeholder e-newsletter—River Reach. The MDBA aims to achieve a healthy working Basin for the benefit of the Australian community. This is no small task and we must work together.

The [Basin Plan](#) is a vital water reform. There is consensus across all governments that the Plan is required to manage our most precious resource—water. In December last year we released the first annual Basin Plan [report card](#). It is an update on six key elements of Basin Plan implementation.

Our commitment is to provide timely and accurate updates on elements of the Plan that are of most concern to you—and this newsletter is one way we are doing that. Let us know what you think about our first edition by emailing [newsletter@mdba.gov.au](mailto:newsletter@mdba.gov.au).

Over the past few months drought conditions across the Basin have worsened, and the tragic fish death events in the Lower Darling have been devastating. We continue to see every aspect of the Basin Plan remain the subject of vigorous debate, just as it was when the Plan was developed. Despite the debate, all governments have reiterated their commitment to the Plan. We must keep on.

The South Australian Royal Commission provided their report to the South Australian Government—and [we've responded](#). The Basin Community Committee, made up of 16 people living in communities across the Basin, has come together and decided to [provide their own public response](#). It is a valuable Basin stakeholder perspective which aligns to other feedback we have been receiving.

The MDBA continues to run the River Murray on behalf of Basin state governments. We have [assessed the risks](#) that could impact on water order deliveries over the coming months.

We know that water is vital for our rivers, lakes and wetlands and communities and the industries that support them—we want to keep you informed of what is happening, across the Basin.



Temperatures across Australia are now 1°C hotter (on average) relative to 1910.

We know climate change is impacting on the Basin—the atmosphere is warming, rainfall patterns are shifting, and extreme weather events such as storms, droughts and floods are becoming more frequent and intense. To ensure the health of the Basin system now and into the future, we know there is more to learn about climate change and its implications for the Basin. The MDBA is committed to understanding and using the best available science from leading research bodies, scientists, government and independent experts.

Early this week, we released a discussion paper—[Climate change and the Murray–Darling Basin Plan](#). The paper—which explains how the Basin Plan helps manage and adapt to climate change impacts, also raises a number of focus questions to stimulate thinking around climate change risks and adaptation in the basin.

A series of climate change workshops during 2019, involving the MDBA’s independent [Advisory Committee on Social, Economic and Environmental Sciences](#) (ACSEES), government and independent experts, will explore what further research is needed to answer these questions, and how the MDBA can collaborate with the research community to get this work underway.

To get across climate change and the Murray–Darling Basin Plan, please read the [discussion paper](#), [media release](#) and also check out the Paper’s [summary snapshot](#).

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## Fresh flush: improving water quality for native fish



Murrumbidgee River at Balranald Weir (courtesy of NSW Office of Environment and Heritage).

The tragic fish deaths in the Lower Darling are a terrible reminder of the effects drought can have on our environment. An [independent panel](#) has been appointed by the Australian Government, to assess fish death events in December 2018 and January 2019. The panel is considering the causes of the events, whether existing water management arrangements are effective, and how arrangements could be improved.

A [mass fish death](#) event is a sudden and unexpected mass mortality of fish. There are many causes of fish deaths and often they are caused by natural events, such as high water temperatures, low or high river flows, poor water quality and low oxygen levels—but in many instances it is unknown what causes a mass fish death event.

So what can be done and what are Basin governments doing to improve water quality for native fish?

An example of actions being taken can be seen in the lower Murrumbidgee catchment. There has been low rainfall in recent months, resulting in low river flows in the Lower Murrumbidgee. This has been coupled with a blue-green algae outbreak and high temperatures across summer, but water is still flowing. This means the area is at high risk for a fish death event that we have seen in other parts of the Basin this summer. A localised fish death event that resulted in the deaths of up to 10,000 fish including Murray Cod, Golden and Silver Perch and carp was reported at Redbank Weir near Balranald in late January by the [NSW Department of Primary Industries](#).

In mid-January environmental water agencies banded together to respond by delivering up to 26 gigalitres of water for the environment to the region, in an attempt to deliver a small flush through the system and improve oxygen levels and water quality over the hottest months of summer. This has been successful so far—the oxygen levels in the water are higher than they have been all month and are still rising, although Redbank Weir remains a watchpoint.

MDBA Executive Director of River Management Andrew Reynolds said the release was an example of Basin water managers working together to help mitigate against further fish deaths.

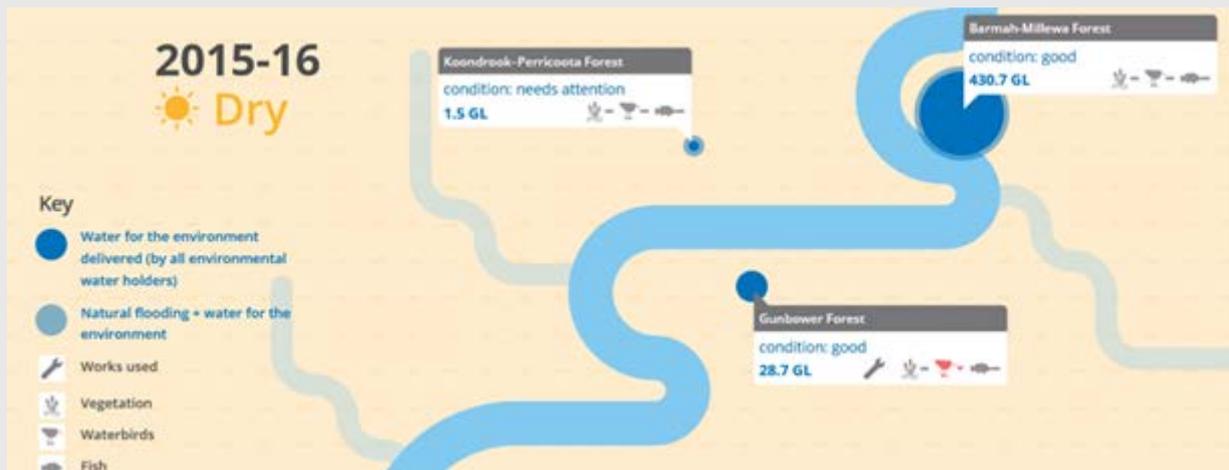
"Environmental water holders are doing everything they can to help fish, other wildlife and vegetation survive challenging river conditions," Mr Reynolds said.

The Australian Government Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources, David Littleproud MP, has released a recommended action plan prepared by MDBA, with Basin governments having contributed to its development. Work to implement has started.

Read the [recommended action plan in response to recent fish death events](#).

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## Drop in and check out the new Water for Environment website



Explore the environmental outcomes of releases of water combined with rainfall and flows in the new web pages.

Last month, the MDBA launched a new interactive section on the MDBA website that explains the crucial role that water for the environment is playing in the health of the Murray–Darling Basin. According to the recently released MDBA [Basin environmental watering outlook 2019–20](#), with drought conditions expected to continue across the Basin, water for the environment will be crucial for supporting refuge habitats that help protect our unique landscapes and the plants and animals that rely on them to survive.

The web update provides new information on water for the environment—why we need it, how decisions are made on where this water goes, how it is delivered and most importantly, what progress and outcomes we are seeing from environmental watering.

We constantly evaluate the outcomes of releasing water to benefit the environment. Each year, we evaluate the health of important sites in the Basin, scoring them according to the health of ecological objectives—vegetation, birds, fish and other measures including frogs. At the click of a button, you can now see a long-term view (from 2006–07 to 2016–17) of how natural and released water is improving outcomes, and how each site is tracking over time.

With this new '[Water over time](#)' section, we have particularly focused on highlighting the changing condition of some key wetland and floodplain sites along the Murray that now have more than ten years of monitoring. Over time we acknowledge that there is room to improve and expand to other sites in the Basin. The next report card detailing how icon water sites are tracking for 2017–18, will be published in April.

The MDBA would like to thank our partner agencies for their input and contribution to the new water for the environment website. And we welcome feedback on the MDBA website at any time, through our email: [engagement@mdba.gov.au](mailto:engagement@mdba.gov.au).

Find out more at the new [Water for the Environment website](#)  
Read the [Basin environmental watering outlook 2019–20](#)



## On the horizon

A snapshot of what's coming up:

- **5–6 March:** [ABARES Outlook 2019 Conference](#) is gathering this year in Canberra, to explore the outlook for Australia's agricultural industries. MDBA are sponsoring this event, presenting on the Tuesday, and look forward to being available for a chat at our trade stand.
- **10–16 March:** this year is the 20th anniversary of [National Groundwater Awareness Week](#)
- **22 March:** [World Water Day](#) and across 18 to 22 March, the MDBA Education Team will be set up in Canberra's Questacon's Q Lab and giving people young and old the opportunity to interact and conduct a number of water-based activities to mark the day.
- **26–28 March:** [4th Water Sensitive Cities Conference 2019](#) is being held in Brisbane this year
- **27–28 March:** [the Basin Community Committee](#) will meet in Moree, NSW. If you would like to get in touch with any of the members, at any time, you can do so by emailing [BCC.Secretariat@mdba.gov.au](mailto:BCC.Secretariat@mdba.gov.au).
- **Later in March:** MDBA's next quarterly report on water resource plan progress will be released (for last quarter's [click here](#)).
- **By 31 March:** the [Independent Panel](#) to report to government on fish deaths in the Lower Darling.

### Connect with us

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

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### The Murray-Darling Basin

