

# RIVER REACH



March 2019

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## A message from MDBA Chief Executive Phillip Glyde

Welcome to our second issue of the MDBA's newsletter, River Reach. We are pleased to provide you with regular updates on key issues, outcomes and priorities across the Murray–Darling Basin, in a new way. Thanks to those of you who provided feedback on the first issue.

March isn't over yet but it's already been a month of big announcements, including the Government's plans for further regionalisation of the MDBA. We have a long-held commitment to being accessible to stakeholders and communities in the Basin, and with extra funding and a realistic timeframe, we're looking forward to supporting this commitment with the appropriate location of functions and capability.

In addition to our offices in Adelaide, Albury-Wodonga, Canberra, Toowoomba and Goondiwindi, we are planning to establish new offices in Murray Bridge, Mildura and Griffith. The government's intention is for a third of our workforce (around 100 positions) to be regionally located by 2021. I look forward to updating you on our progress towards this goal.

There continues to be cooperation between the Commonwealth, state and local agencies to mitigate further fish deaths in the Basin—through a range of actions including targeted water quality monitoring, using satellite imagery to locate habitats, intelligence sharing and funding aerators in the Lower Darling. By the end of March, we'll have the findings from the independent panel assessment into the fish deaths in the Lower Darling, which will help guide this work.

Today, we released a report titled: [Losses in the River Murray System 2018–19](#) the MDBA's first report of its kind. The reports aims to explain how system losses vary each year, due to a range of conditions,

and how the MDBA works to minimise losses and operate the river as efficiently as possible. Losses are high this year, due to a range of reasons including evaporation, seepage, low rain and hot weather. We have also interviewed Director of River Operations, Jacqui Hickey, who tells us more about how water along the River Murray is shared, allocated and delivered.

These are challenging times and we are part of an evolving and vital water management sector. International World Water Day was on 22 March and this year we marked the day with the launch of a breakfast series we've called Basin & Eggs. On the ticket were three people with very different perspectives on water and the role it plays, talking about their areas of expertise and on-the-ground experience.

## A Basin in drought



MDBA Executive Director Andrew Reynolds speaking at ABARES Outlook conference.

The Murray–Darling Basin has been in drought for some time and this is having a significant impact on Basin communities, industries and the environment.

In the six months to December 2018, all Basin states experienced lower inflows than the same time in 2017 and inflows to the River Murray system were within the lowest 10% on record. Water in storages across NSW was at 37% compared with 62% at the same time last year (and it is now lower).

To keep you across the latest drought conditions across the Basin, the MDBA is publishing a new fortnightly drought update on our website. Drawing together information from other agencies, including the Bureau of Meteorology, this update includes information on:

- rainfall

- temperature
- water quality (salinity and blue-green algae)
- water in major basin storages
- support services for farmers and communities.

## Planning for next summer

Planning to manage the probability of low water availability next summer is already underway.

Speaking at the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences (ABARES) National Outlook Conference in Canberra earlier this month, MDBA Executive Director of River Management, Andrew Reynolds, said “advice from the Bureau of Meteorology means we can’t bank on increased or even average rainfall this coming Winter. In fact, if anything, it’s likely to be drier so any rain that does fall, does so into dry catchments which in turn reduces inflows to storages.

“The MDBA’s role in the southern-connected Basin is to share the water between Victoria and New South Wales who then supply South Australia its share.

“Before water is available for the states we need to make sure there is enough to run the system and to support critical human water needs.

“Our river management is now focused on conserving water as best we can with Lake Dartmouth, our main drought storage, currently holding about a third of all water available in the Basin.

“It’s just too early to forecast the impact of the current conditions on next year’s allocations.” Mr Reynolds said.

- For more about ABARES and the annual Outlook conference click [here](#).
- Read our media release: [expected low water availability central to planning for next Summer](#).
- Read the latest [Basin drought update \(26 March issue\)](#).

## River Murray allocations



Murray-Darling Basin Authority

Sharing the water - interview with Jacqui Hickey

7:23



Click on the image to hear from the Director of River Murray Operations at the MDBA, Jacqui Hickey on how water along the River Murray is shared, allocated and delivered.

## Water resource plans



Click on the image to watch the latest update from Executive Director Carl Binning, on how the Basin's 33 water resource plans are progressing.

Water resource plans (WRPs) are integral to implementing the Basin Plan and form a critical part of how Basin state water management rules will meet Basin-scale objectives.

Basin State governments are working hard to progress their plans and that includes consulting with Traditional Owners and communities, to finalise their proposed WRPs for assessment by MDBA.

There are 33 WRPs in total, covering groundwater and surface water resources. One WRP has been accredited and is currently operational (as at March 2019). Another WRP is currently with the Commonwealth Minister responsible for water, for an accreditation decision; and there are six WRPs being assessed by the MDBA. Not all plans will be accredited by 30 June 2019, as originally intended, and extension arrangements were put in place by the Minister late last year.

The latest *Water Resource Plans – quarterly report* (March 2019) outlines progress-to-date; which States have sought extensions; and what steps and formal agreements, such as bilateral agreements, are being

made to ensure sustainable diversion limits and protections for environmental water will be in place by 1 July 2019.

The [interagency agreement](#) now in place between the MDBA and New South Wales, is such an assurance.

It provides transparency and gives the MDBA and the community confidence in key Basin Plan outcomes across all NSW catchments.

- For more information about WRPs including a map of WRP areas visit the [WRP page](#).
- Information on WRP extensions is available on the Australian Government [Department of Agriculture and Water Resources](#) website.
- To read the [WRP Quarterly report](#).

### 'Water' you talking about? *New system of diversion limits*



Click on the image to watch the 'explainer' animation on the new system of water limits that will come into effect this year.

Have you ever wanted to know more about how much water can be used by industries and communities in the Basin? Find out about baseline diversion limits and sustainable diversion limits by watching our new 'explainer' video. The new system of water limits begins July 2019, so it's time to find out more about the limits and what they mean for all water users.

## The flow-on—achieving river connectivity through genuine collaboration



Before: 7 May 2018



After: 11 May 2018

Weir at Collarenebri, Barwon River, before and after the watering event.

*Photos: courtesy of the Commonwealth Environmental Water Office.*

Basin states are the frontline compliance and enforcement agencies for the Murray–Darling Basin, and are responsible for regulating water use in the Basin. The MDBA is the independent regulator responsible for developing, implementing and overseeing compliance with the Basin Plan.

We had an opportunity to review compliance arrangements and test the effectiveness of operational activities last year when the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage and the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder agreed to undertake a large-scale joint environmental watering release – The Northern Rivers Connectivity Event.

Water for the environment was released from April to June 2018 to improve the health of rivers under stress from extreme dry conditions in the Barwon–Darling river system.

Temporary restrictions on water extraction were imposed by the NSW Government during the event and NSW Natural Resources Access Regulator and WaterNSW enforced restrictions and monitored the environmental flows by auditing Water Access Licence (WAL) holders' compliance and inspecting properties along the Barwon–Darling River.

Monitoring and analysis of satellite imagery by WaterNSW, the NSW Department of Industry Water, the Commonwealth Environmental Water Office and the MDBA showed the water making its way through the Barwon–Darling.

“The 2018 Northern Rivers Connectivity event’s implementation and subsequent compliance review was an invaluable opportunity to consider the lessons learnt and improve the enduring systems being put in

place to support future water management and compliance activities associated with environmental flow events,” said MDBA Executive Director of Compliance, Russell James.

If you believe someone has done something inconsistent with or in breach of the Basin Plan or an accredited water resource plan we want to hear about it—members of the public can share any concerns via the [Report a breach](#) page on the MDBA website.

For more information on the Northern Rivers connectivity event – read:

- the [joint media release](#)
- the [joint review](#) released in October last year, and
- the MDBA case study of [compliance monitoring using satellite imagery](#).

## World Water Day – a Basin perspective



MDBA involved in three events held to celebrate World Water Day 2019 – clockwise from the top: our inaugural Basin & Eggs seminar; preparations at the SA breakfast; and the MDBA Education team at Questacon's Q Lab.

International World Water Day is celebrated each year on 22 March and focuses attention on the importance of freshwater and advocating for the sustainable management of freshwater resources.

This year's theme, set by the United Nations is 'water for all'. As Australia is a nation facing increased water scarcity and a challenging water policy landscape, the MDBA used the day to host an inaugural breakfast seminar, in a series we've named Basin & Eggs—a regular stakeholder forum to help promote different views and ideas about water reform in Australia.

Speaking as the host of the first MDBA Basin & Eggs seminar breakfast, Authority Interim Chair Joanna Hewitt said "World Water Day highlights global water scarcity problems and as world leaders in river management, the MDBA has expertise and the experience to contribute in this globally important arena."

With that in mind, attendees heard the on-the-ground perspectives of three guest speakers:

- Katrina Myers – Barham-based avocado farmer and young community leader
- Nick Bond – La Trobe University Professor and Director of Murray Darling Freshwater Research Centre
- Will Fargher – Director of analyst and advisory firm, Aither.

In Adelaide, we sponsored a joint South Australia (SA) Water Industry Alliance and SA state branch of the Australian Water Association breakfast. We also had MDBA staff volunteers and members of our education team stationed at Canberra Questacon's Q Lab for the week—inspiring young minds to be curious about how we manage water in Australia and around the world.

- For more about MDBA's World Water Day breakfast seminar series held on 22 March, read the [media release](#).
- You might also like to follow the New South Wales Irrigators Council's World Water Day social media campaign [#envIrrigators](#).



## On the horizon

A snapshot of what's coming up:

- **26–28 March:** [4th Water Sensitive Cities Conference 2019](#) is being held in Brisbane this year
- **28–29 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)
- **By the 31st March:** release of the final report from the Independent Panel appointed to [assess the fish deaths in the Lower Darling](#)
- **2 April:** Federal Budget

- **4 April:** The ACT Government's [Healthy Waterways Project](#) will be conducting a [technical site tour](#) of projects currently under construction in Canberra
- **18 April:** World Heritage Day – connecting people, places and the past

If you know of any upcoming 'events of interest' to people like you, please send an email to [engagement@mdba.gov.au](mailto:engagement@mdba.gov.au)

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#### The Murray-Darling Basin



#### 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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