

RIVER REACH



May 2019

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A message from MDBA Chief Executive

Phillip Glyde

Following the Federal Election on 18 May, the Australian Government and the MDBA are out of Caretaker mode and the normal business of government resumes. This means it's full steam ahead on our key priorities to implement the Basin Plan. We look forward to working with The Hon. David Littleproud MP as the Minister for Water Resources, Drought, Rural Finance, Natural Disasters and Emergency Management, and other Basin Ministers to progress this important reform.

This week I was in Menindee and Pooncarie with the acting Chair of the Authority, Joanna Hewitt AO and Professor Rob Vertessy. Professor Vertessy led the Independent Panel review of the fish deaths in the Lower-Darling and was keen to explain the report in person to the local community members who had provided him with valuable input. Rob outlined the review's findings and recommendations and we covered the Australian Government's \$70 million response to the Panel's recommendations. The community members welcomed the Independent Panel's findings and the acknowledgement of the extent of the environmental, social, cultural and economic impacts on the community. We heard from community members that they felt ignored by governments and that they want a rapid and complete adoption of the Panel's recommendations by all governments.

Today I'm off to Griffith, a future home of the MDBA as a result of our planned increased regional presence. I'll be hosting the second of our breakfast discussion series tomorrow, Basin & Eggs, and look forward to hearing from thought provoking leaders and the community.

The Murray–Darling Basin Ministerial Council (MinCo) is currently scheduled to meet in Queensland in June. MinCo communiqués from previous meetings are available on our website, however we will be improving how we communicate about the outcomes from these important decision-making forums. We are looking at ways we can improve the visibility and accessibility of this information, including direct links from our homepage and updates in future issues of River Reach.

Concerns for water management and the declining health of our rivers continues to be a key policy issue for Australians. As we gear up for a new financial and watering year, these challenges and programs of continuous reform work will build on our core role: implementing the Basin Plan and running the River Murray.

I am pleased to see the ongoing commitment and new funding for important water management projects from government, which include:

- investment in northern Basin satellite and remote river sensors to support compliance activities including monitoring and tracking
- funding for environmental water research to improve understanding of ecological responses and decision-making
- commitment to a Native Fish Management and Recovery Strategy, to protect and restore native fish populations in the Basin
- funding for new and upgraded infrastructure including fishways at Menindee, the Lower Darling and Lake Victoria, and replacing the Wilcannia weir
- a package of measures in response to the independent Vertessy report into fish deaths, including improved metering, ecosystem research, fish re-stocking and improving the connectivity between the Warrego and Darling rivers.

We are also implementing a range of recommendations from the Productivity Commission's five-year assessment, including improving our Basin Plan evaluation framework, which we published this week. The framework will guide the 2020 and 2025 evaluations that will clearly measure and assess if Basin Plan outcomes are being achieved. The framework outlines specific topics that will be reviewed and how we intend to work with stakeholders to ensure a collaborative and participatory approach to this important task.

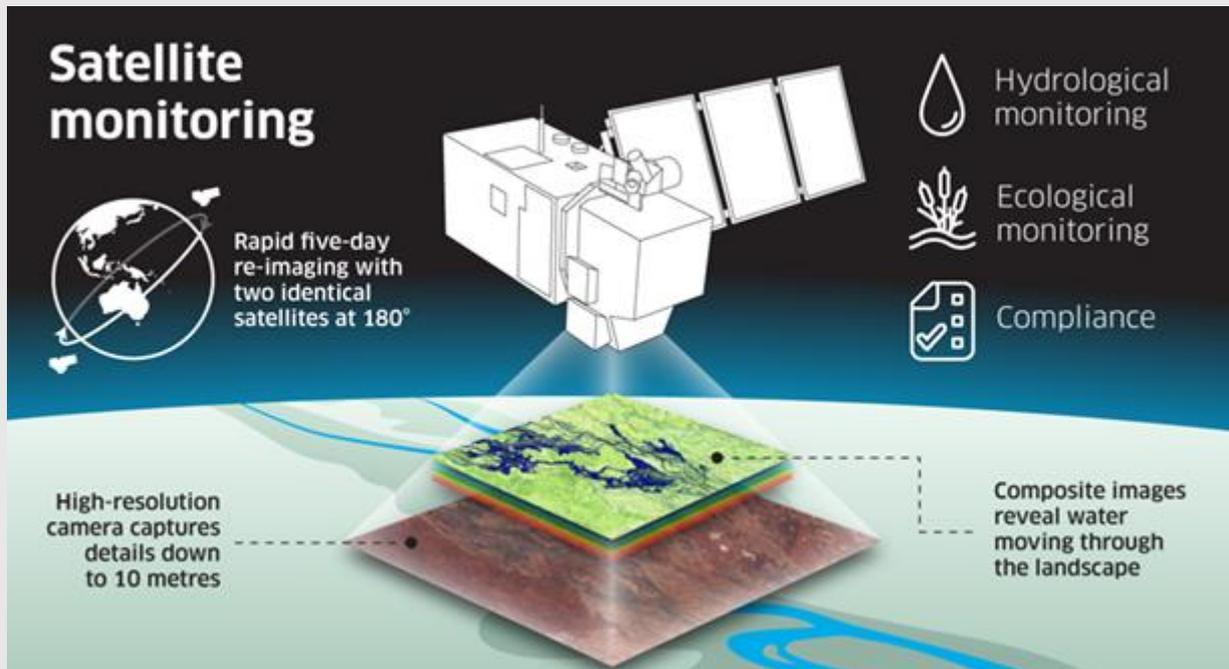
In our March issue of River Reach, I discussed the Government's regionalisation plans for the MDBA. Our team has been considering how we would deliver an effective organisational and functional structure that would see a third or roughly 100 staff located in key regional centres throughout the Murray–Darling Basin by mid-2021. This important work and planning is continuing and I'll keep you updated as planning progresses.

In the face of the sobering drought conditions within the Basin and the outlook for the remainder of the year hitting home, we must continue to adapt and match the resilience and fortitude of Basin communities. Inflows into the River Murray system, since July last year remain in the driest 7% of records and more than 60% of major Basin storages remain at less than half of their full capacity over the same period.

Within this context, we're currently working to finalise the priorities for water for the environment for the next watering year for release at the end of June. Also of keen interest to many water users experiencing persistently dry conditions—we've just released the upcoming water trading opportunities including the water trade credit balance at Barmah Choke.

- find out more about the [final report of the Independent Panel into fish deaths in the Lower-Darling](#)
- for information about the [Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council](#)
- find out about the [trade credit balances](#)
- the [Basin Plan 2020 evaluation framework](#) has been released.

Remote monitoring capability in action – the Northern Fish Flow event



A graphic-based explanation of the capability and the different types of images the Sentinel satellites produce.

The MDBA is committed to using new and emerging remote sensing technologies, such as satellite tracking, to support compliance activities and ensure the protection of water for the environment.

The MDBA's increasing real-time capability to monitor how water behaves and moves through waterways and surrounding landscape is a game changer for river management.

Similar to the use of satellite imagery to track a major watering event through the Barwon and Darling Rivers in 2018, the MDBA is now undertaking monitoring and analysis of water for the environment being released to replenish critical waterholes along the Macintyre, Gwydir and Barwon rivers in the Northern Basin.

The Northern Fish Flow involves the release of 27 to 36 gigalitres of water (across late April to June) from Glenlyon and Copeton dams by the Commonwealth Environmental Water Office (CEWO) and the New South Wales (NSW) Office of Environment and Heritage.

The protected flow will be monitored by the NSW Natural Resources Access Regulator, using the gauge network and on-the-ground compliance activity; and by MDBA's Geographic Information System (GIS) team, using Sentinel satellite images to track where the front of the flow is in the landscape, coupled with the actual measured flow in the rivers.

In terms of the surrounding landscape, the satellite imagery also captures whether water is present in storages and other water bodies, and to the trained eye – how much landscape is crop versus unfarmed ground.

“All this data builds a tapestry of real-time information on how a flow is tracking, said Dr David Weldrake, Manager of the MDBA GIS & Spatial Services Team.

“With every event the MDBA monitors, the team is increasing its in-house expertise and applying a wide range of spatial analysis tools to critical water for the environment events, after having built the capacity to access and analyse imagery within a day of it being taken by the satellite.”

- find out more about the work [the MDBA's GIS team undertakes](#)
- [stay up-to-date on the Northern Fish Flow](#) and see the type of the images the GIS team are analysing
- for more information on the Northern Fish Flow itself [visit the CEWO website](#) and read the April [media release](#).

Hear more about the Northern Fish Flow event



Murray-Darling Basin Authority

Interview with the CEWO's Jason Wilson and MDBA's Sally Dickinson

7:12



Click on the image to hear an interview with local CEWO engagement officer Jason Wilson and MDBA Goondiwindi-based stakeholder engagement officer Sally Dickinson.

A number of MDBA's regional engagement officers—Tom Foster in Macintyre, Annabelle Guest for the Namoi and Gwydir regions, and Peter Thomas in Bourke have been involved in the Northern Fish Flow community information drop-in sessions with their CEWO and state counterparts.

Walgett-based CEWO local engagement officer Jason Wilson is a key contact on-the-ground for this water for the environment flow event, and he's also been getting along to the drop-in sessions with MDBA's Goondiwindi-based stakeholder engagement officer Sally Dickinson.

In this interview recorded on 21 May, hear from Sally and Jason about how communities are responding to the news of this watering event, what they hope the flow might achieve and get a measure of what's been occurring in this northern NSW area.

Five-yearly review of the Basin's environmental watering strategy gets underway



Eastern grey kangaroos or the great grey kangaroo are found in southern and eastern Australia.

The Basin-wide environmental watering strategy—the long-term watering plan for the Basin, is being updated this year and we will be seeking stakeholder feedback along the way. We'll also be including research from the Northern Basin review, reflecting changes to other Basin Plan elements, and incorporating the real-life use of water for the environment.

The Strategy sets out the improvements that we expect to see for river flows and connectivity, native vegetation, waterbirds and native fish. The Strategy also supports coordination in the planning and delivery of water for the environment, and it explains how the MDBA, in consultation with water holders, will determine annual and longer-term priorities for environmental watering.

We will be inviting community feedback when we release a draft updated strategy later this year.

To be involved in the review of the Strategy contact the MDBA at bws@mdba.gov.au or call 1800 630 114.

A year on and black bream in Coorong are going swimmingly



On site monitoring of the Coorong's black bream growth and population health – photograph courtesy of the South Australian Research and Development Institute (SARDI).

The innovative use of environmental water during 2017–18 is resulting in good outcomes for some fish species and other ecological benefits to the internationally recognised Coorong, Lake Alexandrina and Albert Ramsar Wetland in South Australia.

The black bream population in the Coorong region has been in severe decline since the late 80's—with very few fingerlings (young or small fish) recorded in the years preceding the 2017–18 springtime water for the environment delivery to the Lower Lakes and Coorong.

The decision to release around 500 gigalitres of water for the environment from barrages during this critical springtime period was made by the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder in conjunction with the South Australian Government and The Living Murray Program (coordinated by the MDBA). Input from local commercial fishers to the Department of Environment and Water (DEW) in October 2017, flagged that adult female black bream were in good condition and ready to spawn.

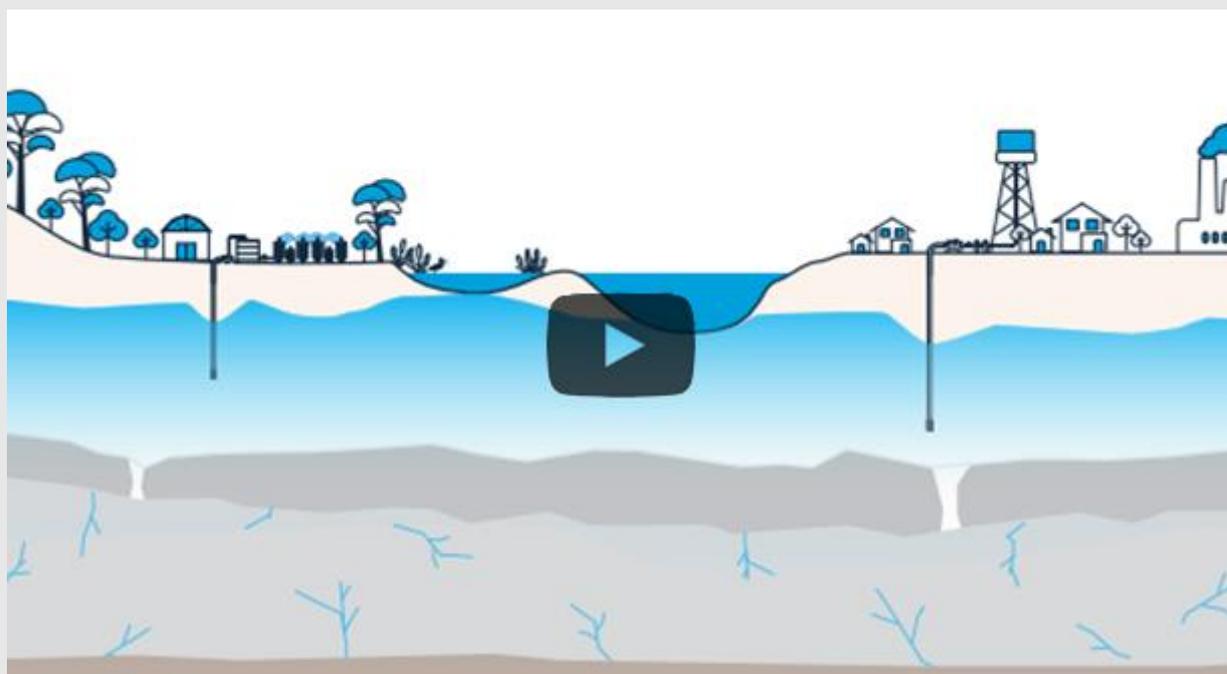
The local tip and ongoing support from the community, and subsequent work with local scientists, resulted in a rare spawning event, and during March and April last year, the South Australian Research and Development Institute (SARDI) Aquatic Sciences carried out fish monitoring and recorded more than 100 black bream fingerlings.

Now, 12-months on, recent SARDI monitoring has confirmed the fingerlings have survived. At the time, MDBA Executive Director Carl Binning said the springtime water release “highlighted the importance of using water for the environment in smarter ways and at specific times.”

“We still have a long way to go in rebuilding the iconic black bream population in the Coorong but thanks to the water released through the barrages where the female adult black bream were observed, we were successful in creating suitable nursery conditions and now, refuges for the juveniles a year on” Mr Binning said.

- To find out more – read the DEW media release: [New generation of black bream appearing in the Coorong](#) and last year’s [DEW May 2018 media release](#) announcing the spawning of more than 100 black bream fingerlings in the Coorong last May.

‘Water’ you talking about? *Groundwater*



Click on the image to watch our new groundwater ‘explainer’ animation.

Groundwater is the water that sits beneath the earth’s surface. It is stored in fractured rocks, porous rocks and soils called aquifers or groundwater systems. Groundwater can connect to surface water, which includes the water in our rivers and wetlands. In the Murray–Darling Basin it is used for drinking water, agriculture, industries and for the environment.

To find out more about groundwater and why it is so important, watch our new explainer animation.

A chance to spout Australia's water management knowledge in Bangkok



Delegates who attended the 7th Mekong River Commission stakeholder forum in Bangkok across 20–21 May.

An important role for the Murray–Darling Basin Authority is sharing the knowledge and experience gained from implementing the Basin Plan—one of the world's first multi-jurisdictional water management frameworks—with other countries facing similar transboundary integrated water resources management challenges.

The MDBA has a long-established international co-engagement and knowledge sharing program which is fostered through hosting overseas delegations and study tours, and participating in key international events where we showcase Australia's water reform approach and share the MDBA's 'lived experience'.

One of the MDBA's longest standing cooperative relationships is with the Mekong River Commission (MRC)—the inter-government agency that works with the governments of the four countries that share responsibility for the sustainable development of the Mekong River. In 1995, the MDBA signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the MRC and in 2014, celebrated 20 years of continuous and meaningful collaboration.

For example, earlier this month, MDBA Executive Director Carl Binning travelled to Bangkok, where he provided the keynote address at the MRC's 7th annual stakeholder forum. In his speech, Mr Binning outlined how Australia's Basin Plan is an exemplar of international transboundary governance. Carl was joined in Bangkok by MDBA Director Belinda Wilson, who led a panel discussion on strengthening implementation of 'cross border' cooperation mechanisms.

The MDBA collaborates with a number of key international partners such as the Australian Water Partnership, the International Centre of Excellence in Water Resource Management and the International Water Centre. Our work with these overseas partners and the MDBA's commitment to ongoing international engagement contributes toward achieving the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – Goal 6: to ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

- find out more about the MRC's [7th annual stakeholder forum](#)
 - and the [Australian Water Partnership](#).
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On the horizon

A snapshot of what's coming up:

On the horizon – current or upcoming dates of interest

- **31 May:** MDBA's *Basin & Eggs breakfast* seminar in Griffith – speakers will include:
 - **Robbie Sefton** – business leader and farmer
 - **Brett Jones** – CEO of Murrumbidgee Irrigation
 - **Bill Williams** – CEO of Proten
- **3 June:** [Basin Community Committee](#) meeting (via teleconference). Get in touch with the Committee at any time via engagement@mdba.gov.au
- **5 June:** [World Environment Day](#)
- **6 June:** [CEWO Northern Fish Flow event](#) – community information drop-in session, Walgett. For more information contact CEWO local engagement officer **Jason Wilson** on 0418 210 389 or email CEWO at: ewater@environment.gov.au
- **7 June:** MDBA's *Basin & Eggs breakfast seminar* in Melbourne – speakers will include:
 - **Professor Rob Vertessy** – the Chair of the [Advisory Committee on Social, Economic and Environmental Sciences \(ACSEES\)](#)
 - **Professor Nick Bond** – ACSEES member
 - **Phil Duncan** – Gwydir member of the [Basin Community Committee](#)
- **13 June:** [CEWO Northern Fish Flow event](#) – community information drop-in session, Brewarrina. For more information contact CEWO local engagement officer **Jason Wilson** on 0418 210 389 or email CEWO at: ewater@environment.gov.au
- **August:** the *Draft Basin-wide environmental watering strategy* will be published and available for comment via the MDBA's [Get involved](#) website.

If you know of any upcoming 'events of interest' to people like you, please send an email to engagement@mdba.gov.au

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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