

RIVER REACH



July 2019

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A message from MDBA Chief Executive

Phillip Glyde

Welcome to the new water year!

1 July 2019 marks a significant milestone as we move into the next phase of the Basin Plan and new limits on water use begin. Otherwise known as sustainable diversion limits, these limits set how much water, on average, can be used in the Basin by towns and communities, farmers and industries, while keeping the rivers and environment healthy.

While these limits are now officially enforceable, more work needs to be done. Having effective water resource plans in place will help ensure water use is sustainable in every region. From 1 July, there are also increased protections for water for the environment, which is vital to achieving Basin Plan outcomes.

On Monday we released the July 2019 MDBA Report Card, which provides a brief, consolidated summary of the MDBA's assessment of Basin Plan implementation. The report card gives a progress score rating on six key elements of Basin Plan implementation. Since releasing the first report card in December last year, we've seen progress in some areas, while other elements are still at risk of delay. The MDBA will continue to work closely with all Basin governments to deliver all elements of this complex reform. We are more than halfway there.

In June, we released our quarterly progress update on water resource plans. Basin governments are on track to submit all plans for assessment by year's end. In the last fortnight, we recommended two Queensland plans to the Commonwealth Minister for accreditation.

Back in April, the Government announced the establishment of an independent panel to undertake an assessment of social and economic conditions in the Basin.

The Panel is led by Robbie Sefton, who has a strong background in regional, rural and agricultural issues. She's joined by five other panellists, who will deliver their interim report to government in December this year, and their final report by April 2020. The MDBA is looking forward to supporting this work as the Panel seeks to identify how communities are changing and what their future needs might be. The Panel is keen to hear from community members so please get involved. More information about how to get involved is on their website at www.basin-socio-economic.com.au

A quick reminder before I sign off—each fortnight we update the MDBA homepage with the Murray–Darling Basin drought update. The summary provides the latest weather patterns and rainfall data from the Bureau of Meteorology, and reports on water quality, salinity and alert levels for blue-green algae.

This fortnightly update includes the type of data and modelling we also draw upon when considering water availability and the likely effect of climate predictions on the planning and management decisions we make, including to operate the River Murray. We will continue to share this type of information with you so you get a clear sense of the prevailing conditions.

- read the [July 2019 Report Card](#) and the accompanying [media release](#)
- read the [latest water resource plans quarterly report](#) and the article in this edition of River Reach
- find out more about [independent assessment of social and economic conditions in the Basin](#) and read [Minister Littleproud's media release](#) about the Panel's first meeting.

View and bookmark our fortnightly drought update



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

[View and bookmark the drought update.](#)

Click on the image to go to the MDBA fortnightly Basin drought update webpage.

Compliance with the Basin Plan – critical to restoring health to the Basin



A solar powered water meter in operation outside Griffith, New South Wales.

Last week the MDBA released its Compliance priorities 2019–20, which sets out six key compliance priority areas for the water year ahead. The priorities include looking closely at incidents of unmeasured take such as floodplain harvesting, the use and regulation of water meters and improving water trade markets.

“As part of our compliance work program for the 2019–20 water year, we’ll also be using the federal funding announced earlier this year, to invest in satellite imagery and remote river sensors to support our compliance activities, particularly across the northern Basin,” said Acting Executive Director of the MDBA Office of Compliance, Mr Brent Williams.

“A priority this year is to review Northern Basin floodplain harvesting infrastructure and state governments’ progress in developing and implementing policy and floodplain harvesting reforms.”

The MDBA’s compliance efforts will also centre on reviewing water meter coverage through a program of site inspections, auditing and looking at the data collection methods being used, and the various metering policies and regulations that currently exist across the five Basin states and territory.

“There is a lack of confidence in the effectiveness of the current metering and measurement policies and we’re working hard to ensure robust measuring arrangements are in place so that compliance with water licence conditions and adherence to the water use limits in the Basin Plan are being accurately measured, and so that we in-turn, can determine whether the limits are being enforced,” said Mr Williams.

On 1 July 2019 the Basin Plan's new sustainable diversion limits came into effect and therefore the MDBA also needs to ensure the water accounting system is strong and systems are in place to keep track of how much water is taken each year, and that this data is publically available.

The MDBA will also be undertaking auditing and cross-checking activities to determine the integrity of the water accounting data it receives from Basin states. Other priorities include keeping a close eye on the progress of projects to adjust sustainable diversion limits, and continuing to provide technical support to help ensure these initiatives achieve the best possible environmental outcomes, with less water.

The new priorities document also provides a summary of last year's compliance work program and what the MDBA did to address the five areas identified as of greatest compliance risk to the Basin Plan across 2018–19.

Highlights from the MDBA's 2018–2019 compliance program include the MDBA trialling the use of satellite imagery to monitor compliance during the Northern Connectivity Event in early 2018; conducting a Basin-wide audit of state trade price reporting arrangements; and undertaking the first assurance report into the implementation of the Murray–Darling Basin Compliance Compact by Basin governments. The Compact sets out a multi-year work plan for Basin governments to improve their metering and compliance regimes, and increase transparency and accountability.

- read the new water year's [Compliance Priorities 2019–20](#) and the [media release](#) we issued
- find out more about the MDBA's [Basin-wide compliance and enforcement](#) role and activities.

Water you talking about? *River operations*



Click on the image to view the new Sharing River Murray water animation.

Sharing River Murray water

Are you curious about how water in the River Murray is shared?

Watch the MDBA's new explainer animation on sharing River Murray water.



Click on the image to view the new River Murray water allocations animation.

River Murray allocations

Dive deeper to learn who allocates water and how it's delivered to water entitlement holders.

Watch the MDBA's new explainer animation on River Murray allocations and delivery.

Environmental water critical to survival of Basin's plants and animals



Three black cormorants, found mainly in freshwater wetlands and pictured here in the Barmah-Millewa Forest.

With the Murray–Darling Basin experiencing dry-to-very-dry conditions, water for the environment will be critical to the survival of the Basin's rivers, floodplains and wetlands and the native species they support.

The Basin annual environmental watering priorities report for 2019–20 details the actions needed by water managers to help achieve the Basin Plan's long-term environmental objectives, and guides the planning of environmental watering and management across the Basin for the upcoming watering year.

Much of the Basin's water-dependent ecosystems are under stress. Several years of higher than average temperatures and lower than average rainfall, as well as changes in rainfall patterns, have all contributed to this situation. The outlook for coming months is for dry-to-very-dry conditions to continue.

Given these conditions, the MDBA expects the focus for environmental water managers will be on avoiding irreversible impacts on species, vegetation communities and important sites, and managing risks to water quality that can affect the health of rivers and use of water.

In some southern Basin catchments, allocations and carryover water is expected to be available, so it might be possible to improve conditions rather than just manage for drought.

For the first time, the report draws together the requirements for river flows, native vegetation, waterbirds and native fish in parts of the Basin that are in particular need of watering in the coming 12 months and which have multiple ecological needs. These include:

- the Barwon and lower Darling rivers
- Narran Lakes
- Koondrook-Perricoota Forest, and
- the Coorong, Lower Lakes and Murray Mouth.

This is not an exclusive list of the areas that need environmental watering. The priorities report also includes longer-term priorities (three-to-five years) and annual guidance for environmental water managers on how to progress in 2019–20.

- the priorities report is available [here](#)
- for a summary of the report, go to our [2019–20 environmental watering snapshot](#), and
- read the media release [announcing the 2019–20 watering year priorities release](#).

Protecting ecosystem health and future proofing against drought



Murray-Darling Basin Authority
Interview with Professor Nick Bond

7:40



Click on the image to hear an interview with Professor Nick Bond.

The Murray–Darling Basin is suffering through one of the driest periods on record. These conditions are having a direct impact on the Basin’s rivers, lakes and wetlands, its communities and the industries that depend on water.

Professor Nick Bond is the Director of the Centre for Freshwater Ecosystems at La Trobe University, and has more than 20-years’ experience working on the ecology and hydrology of rivers and streams, with a focus on water-stressed regions.

In this interview Professor Bond highlights the need for researchers and water managers to work together to manage the Basin’s water resources effectively, in order to avoid long-term damage to the Basin’s ecosystems.

Professor Bond is also a member of the MDBA [Advisory Committee on Social, Economic and Environmental Sciences](#) (ACSEES).

Water resource plans – quarterly progress report



Click on the image to listen to a video message about the progress of Basin state and territory water resource plans from MDBA spokesperson Dr Peta Derham.

The MDBA has released the latest quarterly report for the period up to 31 May 2019, detailing the status of the Basin's 33 water resource plans (WRPs). The report sets out that extensions have been granted—in accordance with the regulation made late last year—and Basin state and territory governments are working cooperatively and effectively with the Murray–Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) to have all plans submitted in 2019.

With the Queensland Warrego-Paroo-Nebine WRP accredited and operational in 2017, as at 17 June, nine plans are currently undergoing assessment by the MDBA. The South Australian Murray Region, Queensland's Border Rivers–Moonie and the Condamine–Balonne plans are now with the Commonwealth Minister responsible for water, for an accreditation decision.

“It is very pleasing that proposed WRPs for areas in Queensland, Victoria, South Australia and the ACT have now been assessed by the MDBA, or are in the process of being assessed,” MDBA Acting Executive Director of Water Resource Planning and Accounting, Dr Peta Derham said.

“1 July 2019 remains a critical date for Basin states and territory governments. Regardless of when WRPs are completed, key elements of the WRPs must be in place from that date before the MDBA will recommend WRPs to the Minister for accreditation.

“These elements include new limits on water diversions and the protection of environmental flows,” Dr Derham said.

WRPs are developed by Basin state governments, assessed by the MDBA who then provide a recommendation to the Minister for an accreditation decision. WRPs are a starting point for establishing new rules on how much water can be taken from the system while leaving enough to keep the environment healthy and helping to achieve community, cultural, environmental and economic outcomes on a region-by-region basis.

Plans will continue to evolve and be adapted over time as new information becomes available. They may need to be reaccredited in the future as they are adjusted and improved.

- watch a [short video message](#) from MDBA WRP spokesperson Dr Peta Derham
- visit the MDBA's [water resource plans page](#) for more information about WRPs and the accreditation process.

South Australia's newest silo artwork a tribute to the River Murray



The work of Garry Duncan (on the left) and Jimmy Dvate (right) on the Waikerie silo site on the south bank of the River Murray, in the Riverland region of South Australia. Photo courtesy of Waikerie Silo Art.

The importance of water for the environment and an appreciation of the Murray–Darling Basin's rivers is put into real-life context with the recent opening of the newest silo artwork outside the South Australia (SA) Riverlands' town of Waikerie.

The large-scale mural is a tribute to the River Murray and the two artists chosen to create the double-sided piece were given the theme 'healthy river, healthy community' to inspire their designs.

The chosen theme and resulting artwork is also a nod to the ongoing work between Nature Foundation South Australia (NFSA) and its Water for Nature program – which aims to educate people about the rivers and water for the environment, and works with SA communities to source water and deliver community-driven projects that benefit wetlands and floodplains.

Embracing the theme and with a strong connection to the land and river scapes, both artists – South Australian Kanmantoo-based artist Garry Duncan and Jimmy Dvate from Melbourne, featured semi abstract river scapes with local fauna including the rain moth or Waikerie, a regent parrot, yabby and the endangered Murray hardyhead fish.

Speaking during interviews earlier in the year, artist Garry Duncan said his giant semi-abstract river landscape was about capturing how important the (Murray) river is and what we stand to lose if we don't act to protect it. He also said he thought the silos were the perfect canvas to educate the public about the need to care for the River Murray.

Australia's burgeoning silo art scene, which started in the wheat belt region of Western Australia in 2015, has taken off on a national scale. Huge mural-style artworks are now adorning the curved surfaces of water towers, silos and grain storages across numerous regions, giving sightseers an insight into the meaning of place, community and country.

The Waikerie silo artwork—the fifth silo artwork for SA and 25th in the country in the Australian Silo Art trail collection—is a partnership between NFSA, the District Council of Loxton Waikerie and a small working group from the Waikerie Community. The project was funded by the SA Government and sponsored by NFSA and silo owner Viterra.

- listen to an [interview with artist Garry Duncan](#) on ABC radio
- visit the Waikerie Silo Art project's [Facebook page](#) for more vision and videos
- find out more about the [Waikerie Silo Art Project](#) on the Nature Foundation SA site.



On the horizon

A snapshot of what's coming up:

On the horizon – current or upcoming dates of interest

- **2–3 July:** MDBA Authority Meeting – Shepparton
- **4 July:** MDBA National Peaks Briefing – Canberra
- **30–31 July:** Basin Community Committee meeting – Canberra. Get in touch with the Committee at any time via engagement@mdba.gov.au
- **8–15 July:** [NAIDOC Week](#)
- **Across July:** NSW Department of Industry (NSW DPI) – floodplain harvesting policy workshops will be held in **Narrabri** (16 July), **Dubbo** (17 July), **Sydney** (18 July), **Deniliquin** (30 July), and **Wentworth** (31 July). These sessions will offer communities an opportunity to hear about the [peer review findings](#) as well as actions that the NSW DPI will be taking in response to the recommendations.
- **Across July & early August:** new rules of non-urban water metering are being rolled out and the NSW DPI is conducting a series of public information sessions across 12 locations in NSW in July and August. Visit their [metering roadshow](#) page for the list of dates, locations and registration details.
- **In 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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