Stakeholder Engagement Strategy

Involving Australia in the development of the Murray–Darling Basin Plan

Developed by the Murray–Darling Basin Authority
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Stakeholder engagement strategy

Stakeholder engagement is a critical component in developing the Basin Plan. The Murray–Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) is engaging with people to help them understand the Basin Plan development process and to improve the plan itself. We have put this strategy in place to guide our engagement with a broad range of stakeholders during the development of the Basin Plan.

We are holding regional community discussions and information sessions as well as meeting with stakeholder groups and government agencies. Engagement will also be essential to implementing and reviewing the Basin Plan and MDBA will refine and extend the strategy to include more activities in the future.

About the Murray–Darling Basin Authority

MDBA is a Commonwealth agency established to work with the Basin states to manage the Murray–Darling Basin’s water resources in the national interest. MDBA is responsible for preparing and overseeing a legally enforceable management plan – the Basin Plan.

The Basin Plan will:

• set and enforce environmentally sustainable limits on the quantities of water that may be taken from Basin water resources
• set Basin-wide environmental, water quality and salinity objectives
• develop efficient water trading regimes across the Basin
• set requirements for state water resource plans
• improve water security for all Basin water uses.

Further information on the Basin Plan can be found in the Basin Plan Concept Statement and on our website.

Why we are engaging stakeholders

Engagement offers us an opportunity to draw on people’s knowledge, and to build support for, and involvement in the Basin Planning process.

The way we engage and the types of activities we use will help to build stakeholder confidence in the engagement process. We believe that through our engagement MDBA will achieve a better Basin Plan which people are better able to adapt to and implement.

In addition to government policy commitments, the Commonwealth Water Act 2007 [the Water Act] states that MDBA must consult with the Basin Officials Committee, the Basin states and the Basin Community Committee in preparing the Basin Plan. The Water act also sets out a detailed public consultation process for the proposed Basin Plan.

Identifying our stakeholders

Our stakeholders are groups or individuals who have an interest in the development and implementation of the Basin Plan and the activities of MDBA.

In preparing the stakeholder engagement strategy, MDBA have identified over 1000 stakeholder groups who can be broadly grouped as follows:

• people living in the basin and the broader Australian community
• industry, conservation, recreation and community groups
• local governments
• Indigenous peoples
• Basin Community Committee
• Basin Officials Committee
• state government agencies and departments — scientific, technical and policy
• Commonwealth Government agencies and departments — scientific, technical and policy
• science & research communities.

Engaging with stakeholders is an important part of developing the Basin Plan. We believe that through engaging with a broad range of stakeholders MDBA will achieve a better Basin Plan.

The Cirillo family, grape producers from Mildura in Victoria.
How we will engage with stakeholders

MDBA has been providing many of our stakeholders with information about the Basin Plan and its development prior to the release of this strategy. We have been doing this through presentations, regional community meetings of the Authority and the Basin Community Committee and one-on-one meetings with stakeholder groups.

A variety of additional engagement activities will be held until we have a Basin Plan. These activities include:

- individual meetings with stakeholder groups and communities
- a peak body forum
- a government and science forum
- an Indigenous gathering
- presentations, discussions and information stands at regional Basin Community Committee and Authority meetings
- presentations and information stands at conferences, field days, and agricultural shows
- digital communications including MDBA website, on-line forums and blogs
- fact sheets, an issues paper, as well as technical and research reports
- comprehensive regional workshops during the public consultation and submission phase.

Stakeholder engagement objectives

Our objectives are to:

- increase people’s understanding of the Basin Plan issues and the Basin Plan development process
- create opportunities for people to provide relevant information to the development of the Basin Plan
- increase people’s confidence in the planning and engagement process by MDBA adhering to our engagement principles
- acknowledge and value people’s contribution to the planning process.

Principles underpinning our approach to stakeholder engagement

Our approach to stakeholder engagement is guided by the following principles upon which we will operate and to which we will be accountable.

We are committed to ensure our stakeholder engagement is:

- transparent – MDBA will engage with transparent purpose, goals, accountabilities, expectations and constraints
- inclusive and targeted – MDBA will seek to engage with individuals and organisations that represent the full diversity of those who will be affected by the Basin Plan. We will seek to engage Indigenous people and people who have English as a second language in culturally appropriate ways. We will provide opportunities for people with disabilities, including vision and hearing impaired
- appropriate and adaptive – MDBA will use levels and methods of engagement that suit the group being consulted and our strategy will be adaptive to feedback
- accessible and innovative – MDBA will provide clear, accessible and comprehensive information to people in order to help them understand their engagement with us
- respectful – MDBA will conduct engagement activities in a manner that fosters mutual respect and trust by listening to feedback and responding where possible. We will treat comments and submissions as well as collect and store information in accordance with the Privacy Act 1988 (Commonwealth)
- supportive – we will be sensitive to how the changes resulting from the Basin Plan impact individuals.
The two stages for stakeholder engagement

MDBA is scheduled to release a proposed Basin Plan in mid-2010 for public comment and the first Basin Plan in 2011. We have identified two key stages of stakeholder engagement in developing the Basin Plan:

• the period up to the release of the proposed Basin Plan (scheduled for mid-2010)
• the formal 16-week public consultation period for receiving public submissions (scheduled to commence with the release of the proposed Basin Plan, in mid-2010).

The first phase of the engagement process includes informing the broader community about the development of the Basin Plan and seeking views on specific issues. This will be done through the provision of information described in ‘How we will engage with stakeholders’.

The community will have the opportunity to express views on Basin Plan issues at regional meetings of the Authority and the Basin Community Committee. People will also have an opportunity to provide input on an issues paper to be released in late 2009.

The second phase of the engagement process will include a 16-week formal public consultation period. A round of regional community workshops will be conducted in this phase to provide plenty of opportunities for discussion and questions to help people in developing formal submissions.

MDBA recognises there are a number of government agencies consulting with communities on water related issues at the same time. We are aiming to coordinate our activities with them.

Notes for Fig. 1:

*Authority and BCC meetings will include information stands to distribute information and collect comments on the Basin Plan.

*Timing of regional engagement activities is subject to change. Please refer to MDBA website for latest details of activity timing and venue. Visit www.mdba.gov.au or call 1800 230 067.
Monitoring and evaluation

Measuring our performance in stakeholder engagement is a critical component of the engagement strategy. A monitoring and evaluation framework has been developed to assess how well we are meeting our objectives. We have developed performance criteria to help with ongoing evaluation of stakeholder engagement activities. We will be asking stakeholders to provide feedback on our engagement activities to help ensure we are engaging effectively.

We will also evaluate our engagement activities mid-term (mid-2010) and following the endorsement of the Basin Plan (mid-2011). We welcome your feedback (see below) to assist in the ongoing evaluation of our engagement activities. The result of continuously evaluating our activities is that some of the activities identified in this publication may change. Up to date information can be found on our web site www.mdba.gov.au.

Public submission time frame

We welcome any comments you may have during the development of the Basin Plan. In addition, we will also be inviting formal submissions in mid-2010. As drafting of the proposed Basin Plan will occur during May and June 2010 any comments received during this period will be considered as a formal submission on the proposed Basin Plan.

Submissions can be:
- emailed to engagement@mdba.gov.au
- posted to:
  Murray–Darling Basin Authority
  GPO Box 1801
  Canberra ACT 2601.

Responsibilities for preparing and approving the Basin Plan

These key groups are closely involved in the development of the Basin Plan:

Commonwealth Minister for Climate Change and Water
The Commonwealth Water Minister is responsible for approving the Basin Plan.

MDBA
MDBA is responsible for the overall preparation, implementation and enforcement of the Basin Plan.

MDBA has an important role in engaging with stakeholders and is regularly meeting regionally and providing opportunities for interaction with stakeholder groups and the community. MDBA is using feedback on issues from stakeholders to help inform our decision-making.

Murray–Darling Basin Ministerial Council
The Ministerial Council comprises the Commonwealth Minister for Climate Change and Water, who also chairs the council, and one Minister from each of the Basin states and the ACT. The Ministerial Council has an advisory role in the preparation of the Basin Plan.

Basin Community Committee
The Basin Community Committee (BCC) consists of 16 members who provide a Basin-wide perspective on Basin Plan issues. BCC is meeting regionally and hosting community discussions and events to ensure they understand the issues of concern for the community. They inform MDBA of issues of strategic importance arising at these regional events.

Basin Officials Committee
The Basin Officials Committee (BOC) comprises government officials from the five basin states and territory (Qld, NSW, Vic, SA and ACT) as well as the Commonwealth Government. The committee provides advice to MDBA about engaging with the Basin states in the development of the Basin Plan.

Fig. 2 Responsibilities for preparing and approving the Basin Plan

- Commonwealth Minister for Climate Change and Water
  Makes final decisions

- Murray-Darling Basin Authority
  Prepares the plan

- Engagement with stakeholders

- Ministerial Council, Basin Officials Committee, Basin Community Committee and others
  Provide advice

Further information

For the most up to date information on opportunities for input to the Basin Plan or to comment on the engagement process visit MDBA’s website www.mdba.gov.au, or call 1800 230 067 or email engagement@mdba.gov.au.