The Living Murray is a joint initiative funded by the New South Wales, Victorian, South Australian, Australian Capital Territory and the Commonwealth governments, coordinated by the Murray–Darling Basin Authority. Works on the ground and environmental watering are managed by a partnership of state government departments and catchment management authorities.

By returning water to the environment, and by building infrastructure such as regulators, weirs and fishways, The Living Murray is helping to ensure a healthy, working Murray River into the future.

**ICON SITES**

The Living Murray focuses on maintaining the health of six icon sites along the river, chosen for their environmental, cultural and international significance.

The icon sites are:
- Barmah-Millewa Forest
- Gunbower-Koondrook-Perricoota Forest
- Hattah Lakes
- Chowilla Floodplain and Lindsay-Wallpolla Islands
- The Lower Lakes, Coorong and Murray Mouth
- River Murray Channel
WATER RECOVERY

Permanent, cost-effective recovery of water for the environment is an important step forward in the process of returning the Murray to a healthy working river.

The First Step decision of The Living Murray was to recover 500 gigalitres for return to the environment and to use this water to achieve environmental objectives at the icon sites. This was termed the First Step as it was recognised that it was only the first step towards restoring the Murray River to better health.

Each state has a target amount of water to be recovered by June 2009. This water is recovered through a variety of measures including efficiencies created through water infrastructure upgrades and regulatory reform.

RETURNING WATER TO RIVERS

The Murray River’s floodplains are currently suffering from the combined impact of water diversion, river regulation and record low inflows. This combination has caused a serious decline in the condition of floodplain ecosystems along the length of the river.

The Living Murray is delivering recovered water to icon sites to protect and preserve habitat for plants and animals, including iconic river red gums, birds, frogs, turtles and fish. Some of these species may eventually face extinction if no action is taken.

Environmental water is subject to the same rules and limitations as equivalent licences held by irrigators.

Decisions regarding the use of environmental water are based on scientific information about where it is most needed and where the best results can be achieved.

ENGINEERING SOLUTIONS TO ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS

Major engineering works at The Living Murray’s icon sites will help deliver water to forests and wetlands, maintaining functioning floodplain communities and providing critical drought refuges for native plants and animals. Without these works the health of the icon sites will continue to decline.

Engineering works include built infrastructure such as regulators (which have gates that can be opened and closed to allow flooding and drying of wetlands), channels, fishways and levee banks.

The infrastructure works are the result of five years of careful planning and modelling and will ensure the most efficient delivery of the environmental water that is available.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

A key part of The Living Murray is to find a balance between social, cultural and environmental needs, as well as national interests, to ensure there is equity in the way that environmental water is delivered.

A number of community-based committees, including a Basin-wide community reference group, and consultation reference groups at each icon site ensure that a broad range of views are sought on the implementation of The Living Murray.

INDIGENOUS PARTNERSHIPS

The Living Murray recognises Indigenous people’s spiritual and cultural connection to their country, and their aspirations to be actively involved in managing the environment.

Indigenous facilitators are employed for all of The Living Murray icon sites.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more information on the results The Living Murray program, visit the Murray-Darling Basin Authority website: www.mdba.gov.au