



Australian Government



MURRAY-DARLING
BASIN AUTHORITY

Water for the environment

Water for the environment maintains and improves the health of rivers by providing water to protect plants, animals and iconic landscapes that rely on rivers.

Healthy rivers support communities and agriculture to thrive.

Many of the rivers and wetlands in the Murray-Darling Basin have been modified to provide water for towns, industries and to grow food. In some rivers, up to half of the water that would have naturally flowed down them each year is removed for human use.

As a result many rivers are not able to function as they would naturally. This means it is necessary to actively manage how water flows through rivers.

Water flows that meet environmental needs are called 'water for the environment'. Water for the environment keeps rivers healthy for people, plants and animals in the Basin.

Water for the environment is set aside in storages and released into rivers and wetlands to support them and the plants and animals that live, feed and breed in them.

Benefits of water for the environment

Water for the environment improves the health of rivers by providing water to support important ecosystems that improve water quality, like wetlands and floodplains.

Water for the environment also provides benefits to communities by:

- increasing opportunities for recreational activities such as fishing, boating and birdwatching
- improving water quality which supports a clean and healthy drinking water supply and brings economic benefits for farmers and industries, like manufacturing
- protecting Australia's iconic landscapes for current and future generations to enjoy.

Key facts

Water for the environment aims to provide enough water to keep rivers healthy. Healthy rivers benefit everyone.



Water is used **for towns, industry and agriculture.**



Water for the environment is set aside **to protect the plants, animals and iconic landscapes** of the Basin.



More than **60 native fish species** rely on rivers in the Basin to feed, grow and breed.



The Basin is home to **120 waterbird species** that depend on rivers to feed, nest and breed.



30,000 wetlands in the Basin filter water which improves water quality.



Environmental flows keep our rivers healthy and sustain plants, animals and fish – **which is also important to First Nations.**



Water for the environment **supports tourism and recreational activities.**



Good-quality water powers **\$24 billion of primary production** across the Basin every year.

Improving river health

Water for the environment is used to improve the health of rivers, wetlands and floodplains. We are seeing **good early signs** that water for the environment is contributing to better river health, in some key areas.

Thriving wetlands full of native fish, plants and waterbirds are indicators of river health.



Native plants

- provide **shelter, habitat, food and shade** for a range of animals
- **stabilise soil and riverbanks** keeping rivers safe for recreational activities and to prevent erosion and collapse during floods
- **filter water and add nutrients** to water to improve water quality, which is important for everyone.



Native fish

- **provide food** for us, birds and animals to survive
- are **culturally significant** to First Nations as both food and for ceremony
- **support the tourism** economy within the Basin through recreational fishing, which is important for many communities.



Native waterbirds

- depend on rivers and wetlands to provide **breeding, roosting and nesting habitat**, as well as food and protection from predators.



Flowing rivers

- Connectivity allows **plants and animals to move between habitats** and along the full length of the river to complete their feeding and breeding cycles
- **flush sediments and salt** downstream, helping rivers within the Basin to regulate water quality.

The Basin is home to **16 internationally significant wetlands**. Australia has to look after these wetlands so migratory birds can refuel for their journey across the globe.

Birds have an important role in global ecosystems.



Delivering water for the environment

Water is stored in dams until the right time for the environment.

It is then released by local water managers to water important ecosystems, at the best time.

In unregulated rivers we have to make sure enough water stays in the river to meet environmental needs.

Roles and responsibilities

A number of water agencies plan, manage and deliver water for the environment across the Murray-Darling Basin.

The Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) provides advice and guidance on when and where to release water for the environment to water holders.

Basin state and territory governments and the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder deliver water for the environment depending on local, regional and cultural needs and climatic conditions.

These agencies and state natural resource management agencies work on the ground to collect information about water quality and the impacts of water for the environment each year.

This information helps the MDBA provide guidance each year to help restore the health of our rivers through water for the environment, one step at a time.



The Murray-Darling Basin

Connect with us.

The MDBA has offices in Adelaide, Albury-Wodonga, Canberra, Goondiwindi, Griffith, Mildura, Murray-Bridge, Toowoomba, and regional engagement officers around the Basin.

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