



What is the Murray–Darling Basin Plan?

The Murray–Darling Basin Plan provides a coordinated approach to water use across the Murray–Darling Basin’s four states and the ACT. It is a major step forward in Australian water reform, balancing environmental, social and economic considerations by setting water use to an environmentally sustainable level.

What is the Basin Plan?

The Basin Plan was passed into law in November 2012 and has been a significant milestone in Australian water reform.

The Basin Plan balances social, economic and environmental demands on the Basin’s water resources, to ensure there are:

- Strong and vibrant communities with sufficient water of a suitable quality for drinking and domestic uses (including in times of drought), as well as for cultural and recreational purposes
- Productive and resilient industries that have long-term confidence in their future, particularly for food and fibre production
- Healthy and diverse ecosystems with rivers regularly connected to their creeks, billabongs and floodplains, and ultimately



Australia’s Murray–Darling Basin

At the heart of the Basin Plan is the need to increase the amount of water for the environment of the Murray–Darling Basin and ensuring sufficient water for all users.

To achieve this balance, the Basin Plan reduces the amount of water that can be taken from the rivers by setting sustainable diversion limits (SDLs) for both surface water and groundwater for each catchment area in the Basin



In 2009, the total level of surface water taken from the Murray–Darling Basin was 13,623 GL a year.

The MDBA Basin Plan sets a new limit on the take of surface water:

- 10,876 GL of surface water could be taken (or diverted) from the Basin each year, and 3,324 GL of groundwater
- This is a decrease in surface water diversions by 2,750 GL a year.

At 31 March 2014, almost 70% of the 2,750 GL has been recovered through investment in more efficient infrastructure, environmental measures and water purchases.

The Basin Plan provides a framework, and working with the Basin states, communities and key stakeholders is crucial in achieving a sustainable Basin system.

Our engagement in developing the Basin Plan enabled us to incorporate Aboriginal values, uses and objectives for water management. Ongoing engagement will also help to assess any social and economic outcomes as a result of the Basin Plan.

The Basin Plan is being phased in over seven years, allowing time for the Basin states, communities and the Australian Government to work together to manage the changes required.

The plan consists of:

- Overall environmental management objectives and outcomes
- Sustainable diversion limits (SDL) – on how much surface water and groundwater can be taken from the Basin
- A sustainable diversion limit adjustment mechanism – allows SDLs to be adjusted under certain circumstances
- Constraints management strategy to address obstacles to delivering environmental water



Diving into the Murray River (photo by Arthur Mostead)

- An environmental watering plan – to protect and restore the Basin’s rivers and wetlands
- A water quality and salinity management plan that sets objectives and targets e.g. a minimum of 2 million tonnes of salt to be exported out of the Murray Mouth each year
- Requirements that state watering plans will have to comply with if they are to be accredited under the Basin Plan by 2019
- A mechanism to manage critical human water needs – the minimum amount of water needed by communities who are dependent on the Basin’s water resources
- The rules for water trading and better access to water market information
- Identifying the risks to continued water availability in the Basin, and strategies to manage them
- A monitoring and evaluation program, including an annual report on the effectiveness of the Basin Plan.

More information

For more information on the Basin Plan, or other Murray–Darling Basin topics, visit our website: www.mdba.gov.au