

# Recommendation on the accreditation of the proposed Condamine-Balonne Water Resource Plan

## Meeting No. 131 of the Authority

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### Recommendation

1. The Murray–Darling Basin Authority (the Authority) has considered and assessed the proposed Condamine-Balonne Water Resource Plan (proposed WRP) for the Condamine-Balonne (WRP area) (**Attachment A**) provided by the Queensland Government on 24 April 2019 consistent with s63(1)(a) of the *Water Act 2007* (Cth) (the Act).
2. The Authority is satisfied that the proposed WRP is consistent with the relevant Basin Plan (*Basin Plan 2012* (Cth), version F2018C00451, registered on 11 July 2018 and in force as of the date of this recommendation) (Basin Plan), as is required by section 55(2) of the Act including:
  - a. the requirements for water resource plans (WRPs); and,
  - b. the long-term annual diversion limits (SDLs) for the water resources of the WRP area.
3. In considering consistency, the Authority has had regard to the legislative framework within which the proposed WRP operates, as is required by section 55(3) of the Act.
4. In exercising its powers and performing its functions, the Authority has had regard to the extent to which the proposed WRP is consistent with the Basin Plan (in accordance with section 56(1)(a) and (b) of the Act).
5. In considering the proposed WRP, the Authority notes that the proposed WRP is based on revised estimates of the Baseline Diversion Limits (BDLs) for the surface water resources of the Condamine-Balonne Sustainable Diversion Limit Resource Unit (SS26) from 978 GL to 1019 GL per year. The revised estimates are due to improvements to methods and modelling used to estimate the BDLs for two forms of take; take from a watercourse and take by floodplain harvesting. The Authority is satisfied that the updated BDL estimates are based on the best available information at the time and reflect the level of development that is set out in the description at Item 4 in Column 2 of Schedule 3 of the Basin Plan.
6. The work undertaken by the Authority and Queensland in developing the Murray-Darling Basin Compliance Compact and the risk assessment for the proposed WRP, identified a number of issues relating to floodplain harvesting, which require ongoing improvement. The Authority notes that Queensland is carrying out a state-wide project to determine fit-for-purpose methods and timing

for measuring all forms of taking overland flow water – which includes all take by floodplain harvesting.

7. The Northern Basin toolkit includes a measure to strengthen the efficient and effective delivery of environmental flows across the northern Basin. As part of the Northern Basin Review completed in November 2016, the Authority recommended that up to 10 GL per year of water could be recovered upstream of Beardmore dam, on the basis that Queensland implement improved protection for this recovered water. The Authority notes that Queensland has now implemented the rules based changes relating to this measure and incorporated them into the proposed WRP. Whilst this doesn't affect WRP accreditation, the Authority also notes, the Commonwealth still needs to purchase around 14 GL of water to bridge the remaining recovery gap.
8. The Authority notes, that the Long Term Watering Plan (LTWP) has been submitted as a supporting document for WRP accreditation. The Authority is satisfied that the LTWP adequately aligns with and supports the relevant requirements for WRP accreditation. However, the Authority considers that more work is required for the long-term watering plan to fully realise the intent of the Environmental Watering Plan (EWP) (Basin Plan, Chapter 8) and fully accounts for the levels of development, ecological risks and connectivity with downstream WRP areas. The MDBA has written to Queensland requesting officials work together to better align the LTWP with EWP. The suggested additional work on the LTWP does not impact on accreditation and can commence once the WRP has been accredited and resources can be deployed. Ideally, this work should be completed before the review of the EWP in 2020. This would allow any relevant findings to be incorporated in that review.
9. **On this basis, the Authority gives the Minister the proposed WRP and recommends that the Minister accredit the proposed WRP.**
10. The Authority's detailed reasoning is set out in the document titled 'Water Resource Plan assessment report, proposed Condamine-Balonne Water Resource Plan', May 2019.