

# Recommendation on the accreditation of the proposed Queensland Border Rivers-Moonie 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 Queensland Border Rivers-Moonie Water Resource Plan ('proposed WRP') for the Queensland Border Rivers-Moonie ('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 contains estimates of the Baseline Diversion Limit (BDL) for the Sustainable Diversion Limit (SDL) resource units in the WRP area which are different from the estimates set out in Column 2 of Schedule 3 of the Basin Plan. The BDL for the Queensland Border Rivers SDL resource unit has changed from 320 to 378 GL per year. The BDL for the Moonie SDL resource unit has changed from 84 to 92 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 revised estimates are consistent with the state water management law settings identified in Paragraph (a) Column 2 at Items 5 and 6 of Schedule 3 of the Basin Plan. The Authority is satisfied that the updated BDL estimates are based on the best available information and reflect the BDL level of development that is set out in the descriptions in Column 2 of Schedule 3 of the Basin Plan.

6. The work undertaken by Queensland in developing the proposed WRP, identified a number of issues relating to floodplain harvesting, which require ongoing improvement. The proposed WRP includes measures, to improve the management and measurement of floodplain harvesting in the WRP area. The Authority notes that the measures in the proposed WRP align with other work to implement the Murray Darling Basin Compliance Compact. In addition, 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. While the provisions in the proposed WRP for the regulation of floodplain harvesting are adequate for WRP accreditation, the Authority has also sought a level of independent review of the Queensland floodplain harvesting licensing approach. In response Queensland has invited the MDBA to participate in the development of the implementation plan for the remaining floodplain harvesting licencing process in the Border Rivers. The process will be managed by an independent contractor and will be delivered in an open consultative manner with stakeholders. It is anticipated that the MDBA’s involvement in the licencing process will build assurance regarding the diligence underlying any future associated amendments to the BDL and consistency with the Basin Plan.
8. Recent recommendation from the [Independent Assessment of the 2018-19 fish deaths in the lower Darling](#) include Queensland (and NSW) committing to protecting low flows in drier conditions and setting an aggressive timeline for the delivery of toolkit measures. Further improvements in low flow protection will require on-going action into the future beyond accreditation of the proposed WRP. This could be progressed by Queensland and NSW jointly developing arrangements to address downstream exceptional circumstances, as agreed in the NSW Queensland Intergovernmental Agreement.
9. 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 LTWP 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 are incorporated in that review.
10. **On this basis the Authority gives the Minister the proposed WRP and recommends that the Minister accredit the proposed WRP.**
11. The Authority’s detailed reasoning is set out in the document titled ‘Water Resource Plan assessment report, proposed Queensland Border Rivers-Moonie Water Resource Plan’, May 2019.