

Recommendation on the accreditation of the proposed South Australian River Murray Water Resource Plan

Meeting No. 136 of the Authority

Recommendation

1. The Murray–Darling Basin Authority ('the Authority') has considered and assessed the proposed South Australian River Murray Water Resource Plan ('proposed WRP') for the South Australian River Murray WRP area ('WRP area') (**Attachment A** to Agenda Item 3.2 of Murray-Darling Basin Authority Meeting Number 136) provided by South Australia on 14 August 2019.
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 at the date of this advice.) ('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 Basin Plan and 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 arriving at its recommendation, the Authority has taken into account the proposed changes to the Baseline Diversion Limit ('BDL') in the WRP area. The proposed WRP is based on a revised estimate of the BDL for take from watercourses of 681.056 GL per year, compared to the estimate of 665 GL per year in the column 2 of Schedule 3 of the Basin Plan. The revised estimate is based on new and improved methods for estimating take, including modelling. The Authority is satisfied that the updated BDL estimate is based on the best available information, using new and improved methods and modelling, and that the revised estimate is consistent with the description in Schedule 3 of the Basin Plan.
6. When preparing the WRP, South Australia expressed a desire to revise the BDL estimate relating to unlicensed stock and domestic take (basic rights) in the order of 6 GL per year. Such a revision could only be included through an amendment to the Basin Plan, as take under basic rights is not currently identified as a form of take for this area in Schedule 3 of the Basin Plan. Given the Basin

Plan does not include this revision, take for unlicensed stock and domestic (basic rights) is managed within take from a watercourse until such time as there is an amendment to the Basin Plan with respect to take under basic rights for the South Australian River Murray WRP area.

7. Water provided to South Australia by the Murray–Darling Basin Agreement includes an annual entitlement volume up to 1,850 GL per year. The basis of the method for calculating the annual permitted take in the proposed WRP is the Source Murray Model, which is also used for determining annual permitted take in the River Murray System upstream of South Australia. The method in the WRP is deemed fit for purpose. There is a need for ongoing improvement for the model, and as part of the agreement, South Australia and the MDBA have committed to refining the model and using multiple lines of evidence from pre-existing methods to complete a joint review of the model assumptions and processes by 30 June 2021. The final outcome of this review will be a validated and agreed version of the Source Murray Model that will form the basis of a future proposed amendment to the WRP for determining the annual permitted take after June 2021.
8. Achieving the environmental watering requirements for priority environmental assets within South Australia, including the Coorong, Lower Lakes and Murray Mouth, is highly dependent on receiving environmental water from upstream and managing this water appropriately within the South Australian River Murray WRP area. Therefore, as outlined in the WRP, the environmental water planning, coordination and delivery is negotiated and supported through the Southern Connected Basin Environmental Watering Committee. Each year this committee considers the available water and the annual priorities put forward by each of the member states (New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia) (consistent with the relevant Long Term Watering Plans) and agrees on environmental outcomes and delivery for volumes of held environmental water.
9. South Australia’s annual watering priorities developed in partnership with water managers and local communities are combined with priorities from across the Basin to help with environmental water planning and delivery at a catchment scale.
10. The proposed WRP includes arrangements for the protection of planned environmental water as required for s 10.09(1) of the Basin Plan. There have been some changes to the arrangements for managing planned environmental water (PEW) in the South Australian River Murray WRP area, and the Authority considers that these changes result in the WRP providing an improved level of protection for PEW than was provided in state water management law immediately before the commencement of the Basin Plan. The current arrangements set out in the proposed WRP, include more explicit identification of unregulated flows, as well as non-consumptive components of South Australia’s Entitlement under the Agreement, as planned environmental water.
11. There are prerequisite policy measures (referred to as unimplemented policy measures in the Basin Plan) outlined in the South Australian River Murray WRP that are intended to ensure the efficient and effective use of environmental water within South Australia. These matters have been assessed separately by the MDBA. However their implementation sits outside the WRP and so do not affect any decision on accreditation.
12. The Authority notes that the proposed WRP has not included the proportion of take that is measured in accordance with agreed metering standards (AS4747) as recommitted to in the Basin Compliance Compact. South Australia recognises in the proposed WRP that it does not have this information, and since the Basin Compliance Compact was endorsed has demonstrated recommitment to improved metering by amending its state regulations to ensure all new and replacement meters from 1 July 2019 are in line with the agreed standards. The Authority expects that following accreditation of the proposed WRP and implementation of the regulations, South

Australia's on-going commitment to the Basin Compliance Compact will ensure that information regarding the proportion of take that is measured in accordance with the agreed standard will be available in the future.

13. **On this basis the Authority gives the Minister the proposed WRP and recommends that the Minister accredit the proposed WRP.**
14. The Authority's detailed reasoning is set out in the document titled 'Water Resource Plan assessment report, proposed South Australian River Murray Water Resource Plan', October 2019.