

# General overview – update of the Basin-wide environmental watering strategy

The Basin-wide environmental watering strategy (the Strategy) is the long-term watering plan for the Basin. It sets out the improvements that we expect to see for river flows and connectivity, native vegetation, waterbirds and native fish with the water being recovered for the Basin environment, and other measures to improve flows in the river system.

Water for the environment maintains and improves the health of the Basin's river systems including plant communities, native animals and ecosystems. Healthy rivers support the cultural needs of First Nations' people, the needs of Basin communities and economic activities including agriculture.

The Strategy supports environmental water holders, Basin state governments, water managers and river operators to plan and manage environmental watering at a Basin scale and over the long term, to achieve the environmental objectives of the Basin Plan. It is complemented by regional long-term watering plans for each water resource plan area, which have a catchment focus.

## Review of the Strategy

The Basin Plan requires the Strategy to be reviewed at least every five years. The Strategy was first published in 2014, so it needs to be updated in 2019.

The Murray–Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) recently completed a comprehensive review of the Strategy. This work included workshops and a survey of stakeholders. The MDBA has decided to stage the updates; the first in November this year and the next update in 2022.

This approach avoids the need for Basin states to immediately review recently finalised long-term watering plans; some plans are still being prepared. It adjusts the timing of the strategy reviews so they occur between Basin Plan evaluations to support adaptive management of water for the environment. It also means that the 2022 update of the Strategy can incorporate recommendations from the review of the Environmental Watering Plan (Chapter 8 of the Basin Plan) which must be completed by late 2020.

## Changes proposed for the 2019 Strategy

The 2019 update:

- captures new knowledge from recent research projects
- includes a clearer explanation of how monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement are undertaken in Basin Plan evaluations
- refines water management strategies to promote greater collaboration between water managers across the Basin

- adds a clear objective to ‘maximise environmental outcomes through effective and efficient environmental water management’ and greater consideration of ‘all water’ in achieving environmental outcomes, and
- reinforces the need to relax constraints, implement pre-requisite policy measures, and solve issues with water delivery to achieve the Basin Plan’s objectives.

This update also identifies work the MDBA will do in cooperation with Basin governments, environmental water holders, river operators, First Nations’ people and other key groups to inform the next update, to be brought forward to 2022.

### Changes proposed for the 2022 strategy

Changes proposed for the 2022 strategy require more research and other work, most of which is underway. For this update, the MDBA is proposing the following changes:

- including First Nations’ objectives and outcomes for shared benefits of environmental water
- adding expected environmental outcomes to the current themes so that all the overall environmental objectives for water-dependent ecosystems can be comprehensively assessed (e.g. threatened species)
- improving the SMARTness (Specific Measurable Achievable Relevant and Time-bound) of expected environmental outcomes so that they are easier to monitor and evaluate, and can inform environmental water delivery
- adding environmental themes where they add value (e.g. ecosystem functions)
- including water management strategies to improve flow coordination for the northern Basin and in the southern connected Basin
- looking at opportunities to improve social and economic outcomes while ensuring the best possible environmental benefits from water for the environment
- adjusting expected environmental outcomes and water management strategies incorporating new knowledge of vulnerability to, and risks of, climate change.

### First Nations Environmental Watering Guidance Project

The MDBA has committed to working with NBAN and MLDRIN to develop and incorporate Basin Nation’s environmental watering objectives into environmental water planning and management. The First Nations Environmental Water Guidance (FNEWG) Project aims to develop a defined and transparent methodology for First Nations’ environmental watering objectives to be incorporated in environmental water planning.

#### Northern Basin:

- *First Nations Environmental Watering Guidance (FNEWG) aims to gather the environmental watering objectives of 21 Nations across five environmental watering themes.*
- *NBAN is working with the MDBA and the CEWO to integrate these objectives into the 2020-21 Basin annual environmental watering priorities and long-term environmental water planning.*

**Southern Basin:**

- *First Nations Environmental Water Objectives (FNEWO): working in partnership with the MBDA and the CEWO, MLDRIN aim to develop an effective and equitable mechanism for First Nations environmental watering objectives to be included in the environmental watering frameworks for the Murray-Darling Basin.*
- *MLDRIN has prepared a collaborative design report outlining sources of information available to nations to develop watering objectives, the resources required by Nations to undertake this work and relevant decision making structures.*

**The 2020 Evaluation of the Basin Plan may also result in further updates to the 2022 Strategy**

**How to provide feedback**

The MDBA is now seeking community feedback on the draft 2019 Strategy, which is available, along with the report of the review via the [Get involved page](#). Feedback received by midnight on Monday 2 September will be considered in finalising the Strategy for release in November.

Feedback can be provided:

- 🌐 via the draft 2019 strategy's [Get involved page](#)
- ✉ by email to [BWS@mdba.gov.au](mailto:BWS@mdba.gov.au) or
- ✉ by post to GPO Box 1801, Canberra ACT 2601.

Unless you tell us that you wish your submission to remain confidential, the MDBA will publish it, after removing your contact details. To learn more about the review of the BWS visit [Get involved](#), contact the MDBA at [bws@mdba.gov.au](mailto:bws@mdba.gov.au) or call 1800 630 114.