



Australian Government



International Engagement Strategy

2021–2024

February 2021

The Basin Plan is a world-leading achievement in multi-jurisdictional management of river basins.

The Murry–Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) recognises the international significance of developing and implementing the Murray–Darling Basin Plan (Basin Plan) and operating the River Murray on behalf of multiple jurisdictions. The MDBA understands there is interest in the experience and lessons learnt from this water reform journey and ongoing river operations role.

The sustainable management of water resources is a global challenge facing many countries and regions, and the MDBA has a responsibility to share its knowledge regarding the management of scarce water resources in a dry and changing climate and contested context. The MDBA also has obligations to undertake its functions having regard to the best available science and knowledge.

The MDBA supports the Australian Government to assist international partners to sustainably manage water resources through existing partnership agreements and its relationship with the Australian Water Partnership. The MDBA also plays a role in international river operations and asset management fora.

There are many benefits to the MDBA investing in knowledge sharing and being internationally connected: developing partnerships, promoting our excellence, building our capability, and sparking innovation through the translation of ideas and testing our knowledge with our peers.

This strategy guides the MDBA’s international engagement activities to realise these benefits.

A coordinated and focused approach...

The International Engagement Strategy sets up a framework for guiding MDBA’s investment in international engagement activities.

The strategy identifies the outcomes the MDBA seeks from its investment in international engagement. It sets out objectives and priority subjects and regions to target activities and collaborations to achieve these goals over the next 4 years.

The strategy is supported by an internal International Engagement Plan to guide the MDBA’s inbound and outbound international engagement activities to ensure benefits are maximised while balancing opportunities with available resources.

This strategy will be used to guide international engagement opportunities and relationships with Australian Government partners, non-government collaborators and international stakeholders.

Biennial review of the strategy will track success against the **objectives** and ensure the **outcomes, priority subjects and regions** remain relevant to the MDBA’s strategic goals and knowledge needs.

...to maximise benefits and reach goals...

International engagement provides benefits to the MDBA and its partners.

The **objectives** of the MDBA's international engagement strategy for 2021–24 are to:

1. **Target knowledge and skill sharing opportunities** with international collaborators on key advocacy issues, areas of MDBA expertise, capability gaps¹, and knowledge needs²,
2. **Meet existing commitments and build strategic international relationships** in river management, river operations, sustainable agriculture, regional development, scientific institutions, and Australian Government partners³.
3. **Provide a conduit for MDBA stakeholders and delivery partners** to connect with international knowledge, expertise and experience to foster best practice river basin management and river operations, and
4. **Provide opportunities for broad staff participation** in international inbound activities and ensure better dissemination of new knowledge and ideas gained through outbound activities.⁴

Achieving these objectives will contribute to the following **outcomes** for the MDBA:

- Demonstrate our expertise and leadership in river Basin management, river operations, and water reform.
- Ensure the MDBA can apply the best available science and knowledge to the management of the Murray–Darling Basin and the operation of the River Murray System
- Build a wider pool of peers for independent validation and testing of our work and for informed advice.
- develop staff expertise and capabilities, provide inspiration and spark innovative ideas, and attract the best talent to work for the MDBA.

...through strategic guidance and whole-of-agency involvement

This Strategy sets the priority subjects and regions for international exchanges.

These **priorities** represent the topics MDBA has expertise to offer international collaborators, subjects we are looking to build knowledge and skills in, and the regions we seek to work with. The priorities determine the relative levels of MDBA investment in international engagement opportunities, capture obligations in existing international agreements and ensure the MDBA gains value from these partnerships.

The Strategy is implemented through an International Engagement Plan.

A supporting International Engagement Plan sets out internal processes for how the MDBA will consider engagement opportunities, from requests for information and inbound exchange visits to outbound secondments and formal partnerships. This will ensure engagement and collaboration activities align with the objectives and priorities set out in this strategy.

¹ Once completed, MDBA Capability Plans should inform the priorities set out in this strategy.

² International engagement activities provide an avenue for knowledge acquisition under the MDBA's Knowledge Framework, and guide activities and opportunities for knowledge exchange under the WER Program and other MDBA research activities.

³ International engagement can provide an additional channel to meet the Tier 1 objective of the MDBA Communication and Engagement approach 2020–23; to influence political and national sphere, national profile building and strong relationships

⁴ To achieve this objective, any international engagement activity proposed in MDBA Capability Plans or for individual staff development should be conducted in accordance with the International Engagement Management Plan.

The Plan also establishes processes to approve and coordinate engagement activities to ensure participation and investment maximises the value to the MDBA’s work beyond the activity itself, and meet our engagement objectives and outcomes.

Consultation across the MDBA will be needed to support the implementation of the strategy.

Buy-in from MDBA programs and capability groups will be needed to ensure international engagement opportunities are identified and activities conducted in accordance with the International Engagement Plan, to share these opportunities, maximise the benefits the activities provide, and contribute to the objective and outcomes of this strategy.

Priority Subjects

Engagement and collaboration activities are based on the principle of two-way learning.

The MDBA recognises the benefits in testing its knowledge and approaches against new ideas or different perspectives and has expertise and experiences to share and learn with others. The division of subjects below is therefore not mutually exclusive. For example, the MDBA has expertise to offer on Basin-scale water planning but can always learn more and develop new skills in this area.

Nevertheless, in the interests of prioritisation, a list of topics the MDBA has expertise in and a list of topics the agency seeks to build knowledge and capabilities in are set out below.

Expertise and experience to share

- Integrated river basin management
- Cross-jurisdictional water governance, planning and management
- Asset management and river operations
- Drought and flood management
- Hydrological Modelling and remote sensing applications
- Environmental water management
- Groundwater planning and management
- Water quality management
- Water reform and regulation in multi-jurisdictional contexts
- Community and stakeholder communication and engagement

Knowledge and skills to explore

- First Nations representation and input
- Climate change adaptation and planning in the context of uncertainty
- Technological advancements in real-time and remote sensing monitoring
- Integrated surface water-groundwater management
- Best practice environmental compliance
- Public participation in water management

Priority Regions

The MDBA also supports the Australian Government to contribute to integrational engagement in water management and assist international partners

Australian international interests in water are managed collaboratively between the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment (DAWE) and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

(DFAT)⁵. Key bilateral water relationships are managed by DAWE through Memorandum's of Understanding (MoUs), and DAWE is also responsible for water-related Sustainable Development Goal 6 reporting and providing water policy advice for Australia's multilateral engagements. International relationships through trade and aid are led by DFAT to ensure that Australia maintains a status as a global citizen in managing emerging water, sanitation and hygiene issues and water scarcity into the future.

Guided by these interests and MDBA's participation in the Australian Water Partnership, the MDBA has a primary focus on providing expertise to countries in the Indo-Pacific region that have transboundary rivers and are planning or implementing integrated 'Basin Plans' (or similar).

The MDBA will also prioritise engagement opportunities within its current partnership agreements, including:

Memorandum of Understanding (MDBA ref)	Lead agency	Date signed	Expiry date
Mekong Basin - MDBA and Mekong River Commission (D19/39336)	MDBA and Mekong River Commission	5 June 2019	5 June 2024
Myanmar - Ayeyarwady - MDB Twinning relationship (D19/15363)	DFAT, MDBA and AWP	July 2017	NA

Other formalised relationships which the MDBA has supported will also be considered in the context of this strategy, guided by the Australian Government's broader interests in water diplomacy (and therefore may be subject to change):

Arrangements (MDBA Ref)	Lead agency	Date signed	Expiry date
International Dams Committee The MDBA currently Chairs this committee	MDBA	NA	NA
Australia – China Water MoU - Aust Government and Ministry of Water Resources (D18/49322)	DAWE (signed when SEWPAC)	24 September 2012	2017
India – Australian government and Government of India Focus on cooperation in the field of Water resources management (D18/49324)	DAWE	20 May 2020	20 May 2025
China – MDBA and Yellow River Conservancy Commission (D10/7934)	MDBA	21 October 2009	NA

⁵ Foreign Policy White Paper (2017). Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, November 2017.

Arrangements (MDBA Ref)	Lead agency	Date signed	Expiry date
Indonesia – DAWE and the Ministry of National Development Planning Focus on Water resources and agricultural development Planning (D18/49325)	DAWE	22 September 2017	22 September 2022
USA – DAWE and the United States Environmental Protection Agency Focus water cooperation (D18/49326)	DAWE	29 February 2016	28 February 2021

The MDBA also seeks to engage with regions and countries recognised as areas of best practice

Under MDBA Capability Plans (in development), capability groups may also identify other regions or countries with expertise in the priority subjects or other topics relevant to developing skills and expertise under this capability.

The MDBA will seek opportunities to engage with relevant countries and regions through relationships with our international partners on an as needs basis and dependent on available resources, aligned to the following capability development needs:

Capability	Priority topic	Priority country/region
Aboriginal Partnerships	First Nations representation and input	New Zealand (Maori) America and Canada (First Nations peoples)
Assets Management Water Delivery	Asset management and river operations	

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