

Joint statement from the Murray–Darling Basin Ministerial Council

The Hon Keith Pitt MP (Commonwealth) chaired the first strategic discussion of Murray–Darling Basin Water Ministers, by video conference on 29 April, 2021, under the new governance arrangements following a review of COAG councils and ministerial forums. The Hon Melinda Pavey (NSW), the Hon Glenn Butcher (Queensland), the Hon David Speirs (South Australia) the Hon Richard Wynne MP (Victoria) and Shane Rattenbury MLA (ACT) all participated in the meeting.

Basin Ministers reconfirmed their shared commitment to progressing projects that keep 605 gigalitres (GL) of water in productive use in the southern Murray–Darling Basin and welcomed an update on the considerable progress made to date. Basin Ministers noted the improved health of the river system as drought conditions ease across much of the Basin.

Within the southern Murray–Darling Basin, 36 projects were nominated by states as part of the Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment Mechanism (SDLAM) which enables the states to implement projects by 30 June 2024 under the Basin Plan to deliver equivalent environmental benefits using less water.

Basin Ministers acknowledged the achievements made to date in implementing the projects and agreed to publish the [independent INDEC report](#) that found 15 of the 36 projects had been completed. The report also identified that a further 15 of the 36 projects would be delivered by June 2024 which is estimated to secure 75% of the required offset. Quarterly update reports will be published to ensure communities have up to date information about progress with the projects.

Basin states are working to secure as much of the offset as possible by June 2024. New South Wales, with Commonwealth support, is accelerating 5 key projects that will secure approximately 45 GL of the Sustainable Diversion Limit Offset before 2024.

Basin Ministers also agreed that following further investigations, the impacts of the recent severe drought and community consultation, that the Menindee Lakes and Yanco Creek Offtake projects need to be rescoped within two months.

Basin Ministers acknowledged the need to engage and work with regional communities to harness and build support for all projects especially those that require modification to capture local conditions and the needs of communities.

Basin Ministers acknowledged the challenges associated with meeting the 605 GL offset target by the June 2024 deadline and the risk of not achieving the 605 GL offset as well as the remaining water recovery in Queensland where ministers committed to a timely bilateral discussion.

Basin Ministers discussed the development of legislation to establish a Commonwealth Inspector General of Water Compliance and noted that the Commonwealth is seeking to have the Bill introduced to Parliament in the winter sitting, that commences on the 11 May, 2021.

Basin Water Ministers welcomed the flows into Menindee Lakes and the relief provided to regional communities and the environment. The MDBA provided an outline of the operations of the Lakes. Other matters discussed included the on and off-farm water efficiency projects and the Aboriginal Water Entitlements Program.