



Out of the BOCs

The Basin Officials Committee (BOC) met via teleconference on 5 August 2021.

The meeting coincided with the commencement of new legislation establishing the Inspector-General of Water Compliance. Responsibility for compliance and enforcement has now been transferred from the Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) to the Office of the Inspector-General. BOC members discussed this significant milestone towards improving trust and transparency in Murray-Darling Basin water management and acknowledged the work of all jurisdictions to prepare the legislation.

BOC was also pleased to note the first version of the Murray-Darling Basin Water Information Portal went live on 29 June 2021. The portal brings together water information from across governments in a more accessible format for water users and communities, providing a one-stop shop for water storage, in-stream flows and trade information. The BOC looks forward to receiving an update on user feedback later in the year, that will see continued adjustments of the portal to better meet user needs.

BOC discussed the updated Off-Farm Efficiency Program, as well as a streamlined approach for reporting on the outcomes of socio-economic criteria assessments to meet community and Ministers' expectations. The first report will be prepared for Ministerial Council later this year.

Delivery of the Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment Mechanism (SDLAM) remains a high priority for the BOC, with Basin Governments working to manage risks to the program and deliver as much of the 605 GL offset as possible by 30 June 2024.

In early 2021, the Australian Government commissioned an independent assessment of the SDLAM program, which was considered by the Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council in April 2021. This assessment identified that seven of the 36 notified SDLAM projects were 'at risk' of not being fully delivered by the statutory deadline of 30 June 2024 and recommended changes to the program. BOC is considering how to respond to these recommendations, as well as receiving updates on actions agreed by Ministerial Council such as NSW's potential rescope of the Menindee Lakes Water Saving and Yanco Creek Offtake Regulator projects. BOC also received an update from NSW on their [Reconnecting River Country Program](#) project, which was launched on 4 August 2021.

The BOC received an update from the [Murray-Darling Basin Authority \(MDBA\)](#) on resource availability in the Basin, and the outlook for the remainder of the season, as well as key MDBA river management activities. The BOC reiterated the importance of ongoing communication and engagement with communities to raise awareness of flood risk and responsibilities in the coming season. The BOC also discussed the existing governance arrangements and operating rules for the Menindee Lakes.

Basin governments agreed to undertake two major bodies of work focused on improving water trade arrangements in the southern-connected Murray-Darling Basin, including a review of water trading rules in the Basin Plan and an investigation into improvements to the interoperability of State systems for water trade. These projects will complement and feed into the work of the independent expert panel, [announced in May 2021](#) as part of the Australian



Murray-Darling Basin Basin Officials Committee

Government's Budget process, to develop a phased implementation plan for water market reform.

The next BOC meeting currently scheduled for September 2021 will have a strong focus on capacity and deliverability issues. Members will be briefed by Dr Jane Doolan, chair of the independent panel on the risks and challenges of delivery shortfall in the southern Murray-Darling Basin.

About the BOC

The BOC has six members – one senior official from each Basin jurisdiction including the Commonwealth – and provides advice to both the Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) and the Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council on matters including Basin Plan implementation and Basin water management policy. The BOC also makes high-level decisions on river operations on the River Murray.

BOC's 2021 workplan is aligned to deliver the priorities that Basin water ministers agreed in [November 2020](#):

- *Support Basin communities through the Murray-Darling Communities Investment Package*
- *Implement the Murray-Darling Basin Plan, including delivery of supply and constraints, efficiency and toolkit measures*
- *Consider reform to the water market following the ACCC final report*
- *Address deliverability risks in the River Murray system.*

More information on the BOC is available on [its webpage](#).