

RIVER REACH



February 2020

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A message from Chief Executive, Phillip Glyde



Welcome to the first edition of River Reach for 2020. Here at the MDBA, we are preparing for a busy and productive year with a packed agenda focusing on supporting Basin communities and delivering ongoing water reform.

It has been a very difficult summer for many, with our Basin communities continuing to battle the ongoing drought and, for some, the devastating bushfires. In recent weeks we have seen variable rain across the Basin, and while it isn't enough to end the drought, it is a much-needed morale boost for rural and regional communities. There were good falls of 200mm in the upper Basin and some northern rivers have begun to flow for the first time in years, including the Moonie River in Queensland. It is however still too early to say how much water will make it into the storages or if rivers across the northern basin will reconnect. There are early signs some flows may reach Menindee Lakes.

Here in Canberra, we have seen some significant changes over the last few months, most recently the appointment of the [Hon Keith Pitt MP](#), member for Hinkler, as the Minister for Resources, Water and Northern Australia. Former Minister, [David Littleproud](#) is returning to the Agriculture portfolio where he will be supported by a newly appointed Departmental secretary – [Andrew Metcalfe](#). I would like to personally thank Minister Littleproud for his ongoing contribution and welcome Minister Pitt to the portfolio.

I have had the opportunity this week, to join Minister Pitt in the southern Basin, to tour the region, meet key stakeholders and demonstrate the important work being undertaken. We

visited many places across the southern Basin, including the Barrages in South Australia and a boat tour of the Barmah Choke.

Back at the MDBA, we welcome our new [acting Authority Chair](#) – Stuart Bunn and thank Joanna Hewitt AO for her contribution over the last twelve months. The Authority met this month and considered a range of issues including the progress on research commissioned from CSIRO and Bureau of Meteorology exploring a range of possible climate futures for the Murray–Darling Basin. Current climate projections show the Basin will experience lower inflows, higher temperatures and more extreme weather events. The Authority underscored the importance of the Basin Plan's vision of a healthy working Basin based on adaptive management. It was a positive meeting and I urge you to read the [Authority's communique](#) to learn more.

This month, we congratulate Phil Duncan on his appointment as our new Chair of the Basin Community Committee. Phil is already meeting and working with Basin communities to ensure their voices are reflected in our strategic planning here at the MDBA.

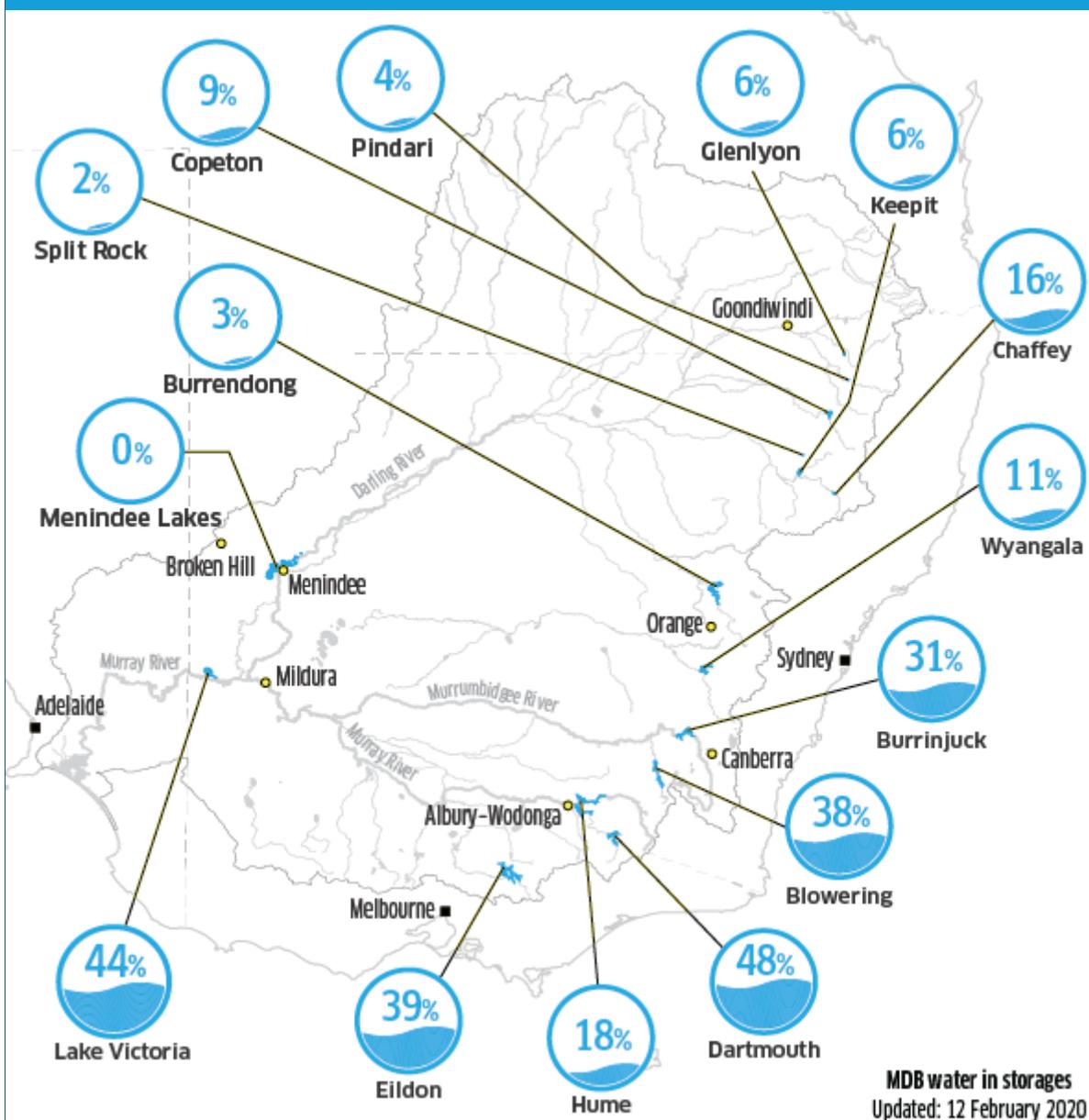
Water management is a challenging and complex task, involving all levels of government, industry and communities. Understandably, this important issue for Australia and indeed the world, is often in the spotlight. This year will be no different, with a range of important external reviews and inquiries underway, including the [Inspector General Review of water sharing](#), the [ACCC Murray-Darling water markets inquiry](#) and the [Independent Murray-Darling Basin Social and Economic Assessment Panel](#). Each of these reviews are due to report in the first half of 2020 and we anticipate their findings will provide important input into government policy.

And finally, here at the MDBA we are making great strides to increase our regional presence across the Basin. In addition to our existing regional footprint, we are in the process of standing up offices in Mildura, Murray Bridge and Griffith. Our increased regional presence aims to promote job creation and boost economic diversification in Australia's regions, as well as to develop a greater understanding of stakeholder interests and needs, improving stakeholder relationships and enhancing regional water management connections. Over the coming months, I look forward to confirming when we will be opening these offices and introducing our regional teams to the community. I am sure you will enjoy this edition of River Reach.

Phillip Glyde

Chief Executive, Murray-Darling Basin Authority

Drought Update - Rain brings relief to communities



Rainfall recorded across most of the Murray–Darling Basin in the past fortnight has brought hope and fresh outlook after months of extreme dry weather. The rain in the Basin was highly variable from east to west, with the heaviest falls recorded outside the Basin.

In the week ending 11 February 2020, the Condamine River catchment recorded the highest falls—close to 200 mm in the upper reaches around Toowoomba. This resulted in moderate flood warnings for the Condamine, Balonne, Moonie, Weir and Macintyre Rivers in Queensland. A minor flood warning was issued for the Paroo River in the far west.

In NSW, water is passing through large sections of the Gwydir, Namoi, Castlereagh and Macquarie catchments. Some northern rivers have begun to flow again, it's still too early to say whether all the storages will receive water or if flows will be enough to connect the rivers.

After months of heatwaves, bushfires and dust storms, the widespread rainfall has resulted in modest rises in some of the [Basin's water storages](#).

The latest fortnightly drought update shows the wet weather brought slightly cooler temperatures to most of the Basin, however a high number of alerts for blue-green algae remain in both [NSW](#) and [Victoria](#).

The drought update is available on the [MDBA website](#).

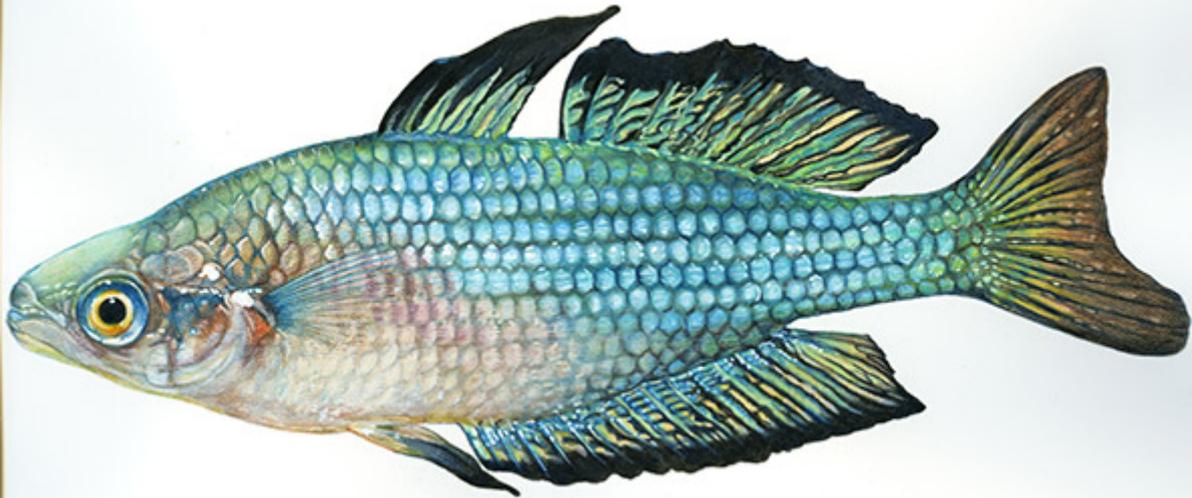


Each fortnight we publish a drought update which includes rainfall and water quality information from across the Basin.



View and bookmark the drought update.

Native Fish Recovery Strategy draft report set to be released



Murray-Darling Rainbowfish

Basin governments are set to release their draft Native Fish Recovery Strategy (NFRS) in March 2020 for public consultation. The NFRS is in response to the fish deaths experienced in the Lower Darling in the summer of 2018–19 and will outline a long-term vision to restore native fish across the Murray–Darling Basin. The Strategy will build on existing native fish initiatives across the Basin and is being developed collaboratively with Basin state governments, First Nations and the wider community.

With collaboration being the focus, the NFRS Framework was published in September 2019 and public feedback was sought to inform Strategy development. Feedback was received through an online survey and targeted stakeholder workshops that highlighted a range of considerations for the NFRS including the need to:

- build upon the success of the 2003 Native Fish Strategy
- take a holistic approach to managing rivers
- consider and incorporate First Nations Traditional Ecological Knowledge
- consider the impacts of climate change
- increase connectivity and provide flows to allow passage for native fish.

This feedback is currently being incorporated into the draft NFRS which will be released for public consultation in March 2020. If you would like to get involved, keep an eye out for details on our [website](#).

Recovery mission saves native fish



Spring Creek near Killarney, Queensland

A rare native Queensland fish species has been saved thanks to a joint emergency rescue operation near Killarney in southern Queensland. In early February, a team of experts travelled out to Killarney and captured 50 blackfish, 150 mountain galaxias and 50 crayfish over a two-day operation.

The Murray–Darling Basin Authority recently approved emergency funding for the rescue operation as part of its [Native Fish Management and Recovery Strategy](#). This strategy aims to identify native fish populations within the Murray–Darling Basin catchment that are at risk as a result of the ongoing and prolonged drought conditions being experienced across the Basin.

Blackfish is a cold-water species that is unable to survive in water temperatures above 28 degrees. Queensland Department of Environment and Science (DES) ecologists identified that blackfish, which is only found in Spring Creek upstream of Killarney was at risk due to ongoing drought, extreme heat and recent bushfire conditions.

To capture the fish, the scientists used a technique known as backpack electro-fishing. This involves briefly introducing an electrical current into the stream, stunning the fish enough to stop them swimming and make them roll over so that they are easier to catch in a net. For the crayfish, scientists used pieces of lamb to attract them out of their burrows and hiding places before scooping them up in nets.

The fish and crays have now been transported to a specialised refrigerated aquaculture facility where they will be kept as an 'insurance' population until the natural conditions improve. If the wild populations do die out in Spring Creek, the captured fish will be released back into the wild once it is safe to do so.

Very few fish were found in sections of the creek where they once thrived. This proves how important this rescue mission was in guaranteeing the survival of these important and rare native species.

Basin Community Committee Chair tours the southern Basin



Click the image above to watch Phil Duncan's tour reflections video.

The newly appointed chair of the Basin Community Committee, Phil Duncan has this month toured the southern Basin to meet with community leaders and stakeholders.

Phil is the first Aboriginal chair appointed to the Basin Community Committee and is a passionate advocate for ensuring the voices of the diverse communities across the Basin are heard at the highest level. The Basin Community Committee is an avenue for communities to share insights and knowledge with the MDBA and Basin governments.

Phil toured the southern Basin, stopping in regional centres such as Griffith, Echuca, Kyabram, Murray Bridge, Meningie and Goolwa. He met with local government members, industry and community representatives and took the opportunity to visit local businesses, farms and environmental sites.

“This was an incredible learning experience. My travels allow me to become more familiar with issues that affect local people and to connect the different perspectives across the Basin.”

“It’s important that we recognise the local knowledge and insights of the people in the Basin, and I’m committed to partnerships, to thinking and talking together about where to from here, together,” said Phil.

Mr Duncan has been a member of the Basin Community Committee since 2018 and formally took up his new role as chair on 1 January 2020. At the February meeting, the Basin Community Committee bid farewell to four members – Rory Treweeke (former Chair), Howard Jones, Karen Hutchinson and Joanne Pfeiffer.



The Basin Community Committee:

Standing: Phil Duncan (new Chair), Adrian Weston, Susan Madden (also Authority member), Amy Fay, Neil Martinson, David Thurley, Sue Rudd, Sandra Peckham, Samantha O’Toole

Seated are the four retiring members: Howard Jones, Rory Treweeke, Karen Hutchinson, Joanne Pfeiffer.

Each of these members have all contributed enormously to the quality of advice that this Committee gives us both in terms of community insights feedback as well as early signals on how the implementation of the Basin Plan may affect communities. Howard, Karen and Joanne have served on the Committee since 2013, and Rory since 2009.

If you would like more information about the Basin Community Committee, including your representative, visit mdba.gov.au/bcc

Compliance monitoring in the Basin



Barwon River at Brewarrina

The need for certainty about water availability and compliance is heightened in drought conditions.

That is why the [MDBA](#) is undertaking a range of activities to increase confidence and transparency in Basin state water metering and monitoring arrangements.

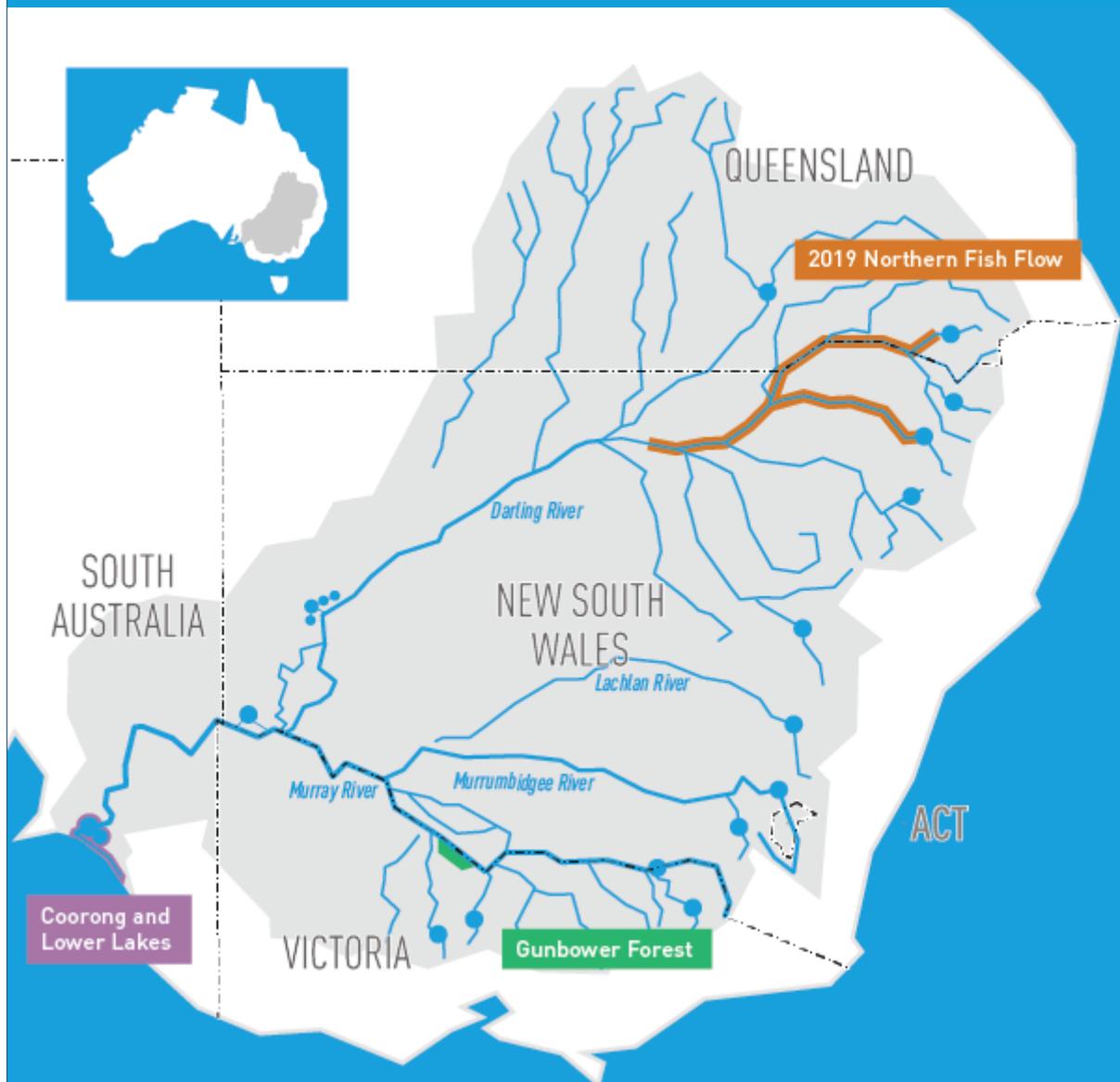
The MDBA is using satellite imagery to follow the current flows in the northern Basin, and if concerns emerge they will be conveyed to states for urgent response.

The MDBA is also completing audits into the adequacy of metering policies and compliance monitoring by the Victorian and South Australian state governments.

The audit reports will be published on our audit and assurance [webpage](#).

The MDBA also maintains a public [register of measures to protect environmental water](#), which outlines governance arrangements, water resource plan rules, and key projects and reports around the protection of water for the environment.

Using water for the environment in a dry year



Environmental flows in the Basin

Everyone who uses the waterways of the Murray–Darling Basin benefits from a healthy river environment. From farmers to fishers, tourists to townspeople, healthy rivers keep us fed with high-quality produce, provide recreational and nature-based activities, and promote vibrant rural communities and businesses. They also sustain unique plants, animals and iconic landscapes that are an essential part of the river ecosystem.

[‘Water for the environment’](#) is used to improve the health of our rivers, wetlands and floodplains. Water is allocated to federal and state environmental water holders across the

Basin, who make decisions about when, where and how much water is released for the environment, and with measurable environmental outcomes in mind.

As expected in a river system the size of the Basin, results are not consistent—some locations are still showing significant environmental strain because of drought and other demands on water. However, each catchment is carrying out different environmental case studies with some great successes being reported.

NSW - Northern Flow

One great case study highlighted in the [2018-19 Barwon-Darling catchment report](#), was the northern fish flow.

Native plants and animals are not the only ones to benefit when rivers are flowing.

[The Northern Fish Flow](#), which was planned and delivered as a partnership between New South Wales, Queensland and Australian Government agencies and the broader community, targeted rivers in the northern basin and also provided important social and cultural outcomes for communities along its path.

The flow filled the Collarenebri, Walgett and Brewarrina weir pools providing much needed relief and hope to communities who had watched their river run dry in places. As water for the environment made its

Vic - Gunbower Forest

The [2018-19 Victoria Environmental Water Holder Reflections report](#) explained the critical watering of Gunbower Forest.

The Gunbower Forest had been in a drying phase for two very hot and dry summers and a very dry winter in 2017, and the floodplain was beginning to show signs of stress.

The Forest is also an incredibly important refuge site for waterbirds, particularly when such large areas of New South Wales and Queensland are so dry.

The watering was critical to ensure it would not go backwards after the gains made through the watering program in recent years. The watering, understorey vegetation in the red gum forests and box woodlands is in the healthiest condition since monitoring began in 2005. It still has some way

SA - Congollis fish recovery

The delivery of water for the environment to the Lower Lakes and Coorong in recent years has enabled congolli and other species of fish to migrate from the Coorong into Lake Alexandrina through fishways.

Fishways on the barrages were closed from 2007–2010 obstructing the upstream migration of juveniles. This resulted in a catastrophic drop in congolli numbers, and there were big concerns of local extinction of the species.

Due to the successful delivery of water for the environment - the native congolli is now the most abundant small-bodied fish species in the Lower Lakes for the first time since surveys began in the mid-2000s.

Congolli spend different parts of their lifecycle in fresh water and salt water. Adult

way along the river, the number of people fishing, camping and generally enjoying the river increased.

Seeing the flow return was culturally significant for local Aboriginal communities, as the river is central to their Dreaming and everyday life.

The event also provided a lifeline for native fish stranded in refuge pools scattered along the length of the river. It improved dissolved oxygen levels, increased availability of food and provided an opportunity for fish to move along the rivers.

to go towards making a full recovery.

females live in fresh water and migrate downstream from Lake Alexandrina to the Coorong estuary and Southern Ocean in winter to breed. In late spring and summer tiny juveniles migrate upstream from the estuary to Lake Alexandrina via the fishways at the barrages.

To learn more about how Basin governments are planning and using water for the environment:

- [Commonwealth Environmental 2019-20 Management Plans](#)
- [Victoria Environmental Water Holder Reflections 2018-19 Report](#)
- [Use of water for the environment in NSW: Outcomes 2018-19 Report](#)
- [South Australian Department for Environment and Water](#)

To learn more about water for the environment and the MDBA's role, read the [MDBA Water for the Environment MDBA 101 Fact Sheet](#) or view the Victorian Environmental Water Holder [explainer video](#).

Are you a keen angler and would like to win \$10,000?



Fly fishing at Porpunkah

[The Victorian Fisheries Authority](#) has announced a fishing competition designed to lure recreational fishers back to bushfire affected areas.

The plan is to tag up to one thousand fish including black bream, dusky flathead and King George whiting with gold markers and release into the waterways in North East Victoria and Gippsland.

The competition is anticipated to begin around Easter and the first 10 recreational fishers to catch a golden tagged fish will win \$10,000. Any other fish caught with the golden tag will receive \$2,000.

Towns including Mallacoota, Cann River, Bemm River, Orbost, Marlo, Lakes Entrance, Lake Tyers, Omeo, Dartmouth, Mitta Mitta, Corryong, Tallangatta and Bright will be the focus of the campaign.

On the horizon

3–4 March:

[ABARES Outlook 2020, Canberra](#)

12–13 March:

[2020 Australian Water Association/International Water Association AUS-NZ Young Water Professionals Conference, Brisbane](#)

22 March:

World Water Day

28 March:

[Earth Hour](#) (20:30 to 21:30)

1–2 April:

[14th NSW Water Industry Operations Conference and Exhibition, Tamworth](#)

The Murray-Darling Basin



The MDBA has offices in Adelaide, Albury-Wodonga, Canberra, Goondiwindi, Griffith, Mildura, Murray Bridge, Toowoomba and regional engagement officers around the Basin

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