

RIVER REACH



November 2020

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A message from Chief Executive, Phillip Glyde



Welcome to our November edition of *River Reach*. As we approach the end of the year and beginning of the summer period, I have been reflecting on what an extraordinary year 2020 has been. Indeed, Basin communities and continue to demonstrate strength and resilience in these unprecedented times. I am sure many are looking forward to taking a well-earned break over the festive season and the prospect of positive change in 2021.

The impact of COVID-19 restrictions continues to be patchy across Basin states and territories with changes to border and other restrictions again announced this month. Despite the need to maintain COVID safe practices and within sometimes rapidly changing restrictions, we have still managed to get out and about in communities with local staff across our office network playing a key role.

Since I welcomed the [Chair](#) of our Authority, Air Chief Marshal Sir Angus Houston AK, AFC (Ret'd) in the [August issue](#) of *River Reach*, he has taken on the role with gusto. Sir Angus and I have headed out on listening tours to the Riverina in New South Wales and South Australia's Riverland, albeit a shorter trip than planned. We were not the only ones taking advantage of the opportunity to cross state borders, the Commonwealth Minister for Resources, Water and Northern Australia The Hon Keith Pitt MP recently officially opened our new office in Murray Bridge.

Before the end of the year we will release the 2020 Basin Plan Evaluation, assessing the outcomes of the Basin Plan and the process to implement it. The Evaluation has provided an opportunity to take stock of what has been achieved and apply the lessons learned to the future. The [Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council](#), which includes the water Ministers of every Basin state and the Australian Government, will consider the findings of the Evaluation when it meets later this week. .

Right across the Basin we have experienced good rainfall this spring. This wet weather is likely to continue into summer and there is even a higher chance of flooding in some Basin states according to the Bureau of Meteorology's (BoM) [Severe Weather Outlook](#). To help prepare for flooding, our River Operations team has been participating in training exercises designed to stimulate flash flooding and very high inflows into Hume Dame and Yarrawonga Weir. Floods are

a natural part of Australia's water cycle and are crucial in providing water to floodplains. However, they can be damaging and present challenges to community and environment. I encourage you to make use of the [flooding information](#) on the MDBA website, which includes key contacts and expected water quality issues that may occur.

I hope you enjoy this issue of *River Reach*. Please know that we value our stakeholders and encourage you to reach out for more information if you have any questions or concerns. Thank you for your ongoing interest and best wishes for a safe and happy festive season and a healthy and productive 2021.

Basin highlights



*Sir Angus with Renmark Irrigation Trust,
General Manager, Rosalie Auricht*



*Humphrey Howie from Renmark Irrigation
Trust, farmer Kate Strachan, and Sir Angus at
Johnson's Waterhole near Renmark*

Despite the recent COVID concerns cutting his listening tour of South Australia's Riverland short, the trip provided Authority Chair, Air Chief Marshal Sir Angus Houston AK, AFC (Ret'd) with a valuable opportunity to meet with stakeholders.. The tour included a visit to the only privately-owned Ramsar site in the state, [Banrock Station Wetland Complex](#) where Sir Angus learned about work to restore the wetland. The [Renmark Irrigation Trust](#) (RIT) shared how collaboration with landholders, irrigators, the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder and local landscape board was delivering water for the environment.

An exciting milestone in the MDBA's regionalisation commitment occurred on Monday, 2 November when the Murray Bridge office in South Australia was officially opened by Federal Minister for Resources, Water and Northern Australia The Hon Keith Pitt MP. The Minister was joined by the Federal Member for Barker, Tony Pasin MP. The MDBA's regionalisation program is progressing well, with offices in Adelaide, Albury–Wodonga, Canberra, Goondiwindi, Griffith, Mildura and Murray Bridge, and regional engagement officers across the Basin.



Griffith office staff



Murray Bridge staff welcomed The Hon Tony Pasin MP and The Hon Keith Pitt MP



Mildura office staff

Flooding and water quality in the Basin



After 12 months of severe drought the Basin is now experiencing the likelihood of flooding, due to recent rain in the southern Basin and the forecast of a wet summer due to La Niña. In positive news for Basin communities, the rain has increased the Hume Dam storage level to 80% capacity as at October.

Dams capture water for communities, industries and the environment and provide a limited opportunity to mitigate floods. Some dams have designated space that is used to capture water during times of flood but, once dams are close to full, they have limited capacity to mitigate floods as large inflows must be passed downstream as they arrive to ensure the dam's structural integrity and safety. This means moderate to large floods below dams will occur from time to time, although less frequently than they did prior to the dam's construction and communities downstream of dams should not be complacent about floods.

During times of flood and high releases stay up-to-date with the latest information on rainfall and river level forecasts and flood watches and warnings from the [Bureau of Meteorology](#) (BoM).

Check www.bom.gov.au/australia/warnings for up-to-date flood warnings in your area.

The MDBA does not provide advice on flooding or evacuations.

Other key contacts include:

[New South Wales State Emergency Service](#)

132 500

[Victoria Emergency Hotline](#)

1800 226 226

[Queensland State Emergency Service](#)

13 74 68

[South Australia General Enquiries](#)

08 8204 1910

[ACT Emergency Services Agency](#)

132 500

Improving information for Basin communities



Lock 6 on the Murray River

The [MDBA website](#) has been refreshed with the community in mind, making it easier for you to find the information you are looking for.

Take a look and find out about [current community concerns and updates](#), as well as the big [issues facing the Basin](#), including:

- Why don't we [close the Murray River mouth](#)?
- Why [fish deaths](#) occur?
- What's the big deal about [salt](#)?
- Can [floods](#) really be an issue when water is scarce?

You can also find out all the information you need to know about why [improving the health of the Basin](#) is so important, [how allocations work](#) and [who manages what](#) across the Basin.

The website refresh is part of a suite of improvements designed to increase the transparency of information available about water management and river operations.

If you prefer to hear your Basin information, we have recorded a range of [interviews on SoundCloud](#) with water management experts. [Listen](#) to Andrew Reynolds, our Executive Director of River Management explain what it means when rain falls downstream of river storages and how it is referred to as 'unregulated flow'.

Check out the new website at www.mdba.gov.au or let us know what information you are seeking by emailing newsletter@mdba.gov.au

Predictions of a wet and wild summer



It might be time to batten down the hatches as the Bureau of Meteorology's (BoM) latest [Severe Weather Outlook](#) shows an increased risk of flooding and cyclones in Basin states.

BoM's Severe Weather Outlook for October 2020 to April 2021 is a stark contrast to a year ago when many Basin communities were seeing poor rainfall and suffering through prolonged drought. The current La Niña means we are likely to see more rain in eastern and northern Australia and some drought affected areas have already had an increase in rain, leading to higher water storage levels.

October through to April is considered the peak period for bushfires, thunderstorms, heatwaves and tropical cyclones. The predicted higher rainfall and humidity means long-running bushfires and extreme heat days are less likely but this does not mean bushfires are not a possibility. With more rain comes an increase in foliage growth which could dry over summer and a few hot, windy days could spark bushfires. New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria are likely to experience heatwaves that last longer and are more humid.

Stay up-to-date with the heatwaves in your area by monitoring BoM's [heatwave service](#) or to watch regular climate and water updates subscribe to [BoM webinars](#).

Basin in Brief

Basin in Brief

Basin in Brief

Basin in Brief provides a monthly summary of rainfall, inflows and water quality information. This page was updated on 13 November 2020.

Highlights in this update

Basin in Brief is a monthly summary of water management issues in the Basin.

Don't forget to bookmark this page

- The entire Basin received rainfall during October.
- Southern Basin storage levels continue to increase; northern catchments remain steady.
- Threats to water quality remain, despite forecast increased rainfall.
- **Spotlight story:** Flooding in the southern Basin.

Check out Basin in Brief on the [MDBA website](#). Basin in Brief provides a monthly summary of rainfall, inflows, water quality information and a spotlight story each month.

Join our Basin community!



Current BCC Chair, Phil Duncan talks about the difference you can make by joining the committee

Those with expertise or an interest in water use and management, local government or First Nations are invited to apply to join the MDBA's Basin Community Committee. Successful applicants will make up the 18-member committee for a 3-year term and help ensure Basin governments are provided with crucial independent advice.

[Check out the position descriptions here](#). Applications close on Thursday, 3 December 2020. Contact Ms Alex Anthony, Director, Engagement at BCC.secretariat@mdba.gov.au on (02) 6279 0790 for more information.

Water for the environment makes a splash



The Lower Darling/Baaka River

This spring, water for the environment has provided plants and wildlife in the southern Basin with a good drink.

The [Southern Spring Flow](#) and [Lower Darling/Baaka Spring Flow](#) both started in September following months of careful planning by the [Southern Connected Basin Environmental Watering Committee](#).

Early reports have been positive for the Southern Spring Flow, with plants in the Barmah–Millewa Forest responding well, evidence of increased frog breeding, and regular booming calls detected of a rare waterbird—the [Australasian bittern](#). Monitoring results are still being collected, with further findings related to the benefits of these flows to river food webs, native fish and other outcomes still to be reported in coming months. As of late November, water for the environment releases for the Southern Spring Flow have begun reducing, however the last of this water will still take several weeks to make its way down the thousands of kilometres of rivers and creeks along the length of the system.

Meanwhile, the Lower Darling/Baaka Spring Flow is intended to continue to mid-January 2021, using water released from Menindee Lakes into the Lower Darling to improve river health and help Murray cod to breed.

This has been the first chance these and other iconic native fish have had to breed in this region since the devastating fish deaths in the summer of 2018/19. Scientists are monitoring the native fish response before, during and after the event to understand how the flows are helping the fish. New South Wales Department of Primary Industries Fisheries have [created a webinar](#) about the work being undertaken to support fish in the Lower Darling/Baaka.

Flow-MER launches newsletter



The Flow-MER program has a new e-newsletter

The Commonwealth Environmental Water Office's on-ground Monitoring, Evaluation and Research program, known as [Flow-MER](#), has launched a quarterly e-newsletter.

The Flow-MER program works in partnership with scientists, water managers and communities across the Murray–Darling Basin to help understand how fish, birds, vegetation and river connectivity are responding to water for the environment.

To subscribe to the e-newsletter head to the [Get Involved page](#) on the Flow-MER website.



Murray-Darling Basin Authority

Interview with Chris Brice – Research Scientist, SARDI

4:41



SARDI Research Scientist, Chris Brice

The [Where in the MDB is Larry this week?](#) campaign is playing a key role in helping uncover the mysteries behind lamprey migration through the River Murray. [Listen](#) to South Australian Research and Development Institute (SARDI), Research Scientist, Chris Brice talk about Larry the lamprey's journey through the Basin and what discoveries researchers are making.

On the horizon

December 2020:

Basin Plan Evaluation webinar – [watch this space](#)

5 December 2020:

[World Soil Day](#)

25 December 2020 - 1 January 2021:

MDBA offices closed

2 February 2021

[World Wetlands Day](#)

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

1800 230 067
engagement@mdba.gov.au

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