South Australian River Murray

Formal submission submitted to the MDBA: 28 February 2019

Disclaimer: South Australia (SA) formally submitted the proposed South Australian River Murray water resource plan (proposed WRP) package to the Murray-Darling Basin Authority (the MDBA) under the Water Act 2007 (Cth). At the time of publication, a recommendation on accreditation has not yet been made by the MDBA to the Commonwealth Minister responsible for water. The proposed WRP is not operational. The publication of the proposed WRP on the MDBA's website is to enable transparency.

The South Australian River Murray WRP area includes all the surface water resources in the River Murray and its floodplain from the South Australian border down to and including Lake Alexandrina and Lake Albert. Portions of the Angas, Bremer and Finniss Rivers and Currency Creek, from the connected Eastern Mount Lofty Ranges WRP area, are also included where they enter Lake Alexandrina.

Through the River Murray area, South Australia extracts approximately 7 per cent of the Basin's total extracted water.

Water resources: The WRP includes surface water within the River Murray and its floodplain within South Australia; groundwater in the area is included in the Murray Region WRP.

Water users: irrigation, industrial use, Metropolitan Adelaide and town water, and high-value ecological communities

For more detailed maps please visit (please note: some plans overlap):
https://www.mdba.gov.au/publications/maps-spatial-data

About water resource plans

Water resource plans are an integral part of implementing the Basin Plan.

They set new rules on how much water can be taken from the system, ensuring the sustainable diversion limit is not exceeded over time.

Basin state governments are developing water resource plans. The Murray-Darling Basin Authority is working closely with Basin state governments to ensure water resource plans meet the requirements of the Basin Plan.

There are 33 water resource plans in total, covering groundwater and surface water management across the Basin. Water resource plans to be completed by state include:

- 20 in New South Wales
- 5 in Victoria
- 3 in Queensland
- 3 in South Australia
- 2 in the Australian Capital Territory

Next steps

The MDBA is currently assessing the South Australian River Murray WRP for consistency with the Basin Plan. The Authority will then consider the assessment and provide a recommendation to the Commonwealth Minister responsible for water that will inform the decision to accredit the WRP or not.

How the WRP was developed

South Australia has been developing this WRP since 2017.

The South Australian River Murray WRP was received by the MDBA in February 2019. The WRP is being assessed by the MDBA, which includes seeking advice from the Murray Lower Darling River Indigenous Nations.

This WRP brings together existing rules and arrangements used by South Australia to manage water in the South Australian River Murray area including the River Murray Water Allocation Plan. Public consultation informed the development of this water allocation plan, and that consultation underpins the WRP.

The South Australian Government worked with Aboriginal Nations to improve the cultural context in the Water Allocation Plan that operates in the area, and to identify objectives and outcomes for water resource management in the South Australian River Murray WRP area.

Regional details

The River Murray in South Australia is a highly regulated system, and is South Australia's largest reliable surface water resource. Water is taken directly from the river for consumptive purposes.

The area includes three wetlands of international importance under the Ramsar Convention, as well as an additional 11 nationally recognised wetlands and floodplains.

The Coorong and Lakes Alexandrina and Albert (including the Murray Mouth) is a Ramsar wetland site covered by both the South Australian River Murray WRP and the South Australian Murray Region WRP.

Watering requirements for the Ramsar wetland sites and other water-dependent ecosystems are partially met by South Australia's entitlement volume, but they also rely on large volumes of environmental water, including unregulated flows.

Addressing risks

Ensuring sufficient water for the Coorong and Lakes Alexandrina and Albert Ramsar Wetland site will require coordination between South Australia and other Basin States. In assessing this WRP and WRPs in adjoining areas, the MDBA will consider whether there are sufficient arrangements in place to manage these connected resources.

Water for the environment must be protected to at least the same level as was in place prior to the Basin Plan. The MDBA's assessment will check that the WRP ensures there is no reduction in the protection of water for the environment.

Arrangements to address other risks will be assessed in the WRP. Some risks include: connectivity, water quality, climate change and water use (which is measured by Baseline diversion limits). For more information about these risks visit: https://www.mdba.gov.au/basin-plan-roll-out/water-resource-plans/common-challenges-across-water-resource-plans

Further information

WRPs complement existing arrangements for water use at the state level. More information about these arrangements can be found the links below:

Water Allocation Plans
https://www.naturalresources.sa.gov.au/samurraydarlingbasin/water/water-allocation-plans

Natural Resources Management Act 2004
https://www.legislation.sa.gov.au/LZ/C/A/Natural%20Resources%20Management%20Act%202004.aspx

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Australian Government

MURRAY–DARLING BASIN AUTHORITY