

OPPORTUNITIES TO DRIVE DELIVERY OF THE MURRAY-DARLING BASIN PLAN

1. Holding Basin jurisdictions to the commitments they made to deliver on the Basin Plan including 450 GL of additional water for the environment.
 - a. Work with States and irrigators to save water for the environment by making operations more efficient. **s. 47C(1)**
 - b. **s. 47C(1)**
 - c. Identify water efficiency opportunities in the urban and recycled areas, like South Australia's Marion recycled stormwater project.
2. Increasing compliance, metering and monitoring by:
 - a. Making sure the IG has necessary powers to ensure state and Commonwealth agency compliance with the Basin Plan.
 - b. Outlining progress to date in hydrometrics and what MDBA and the states still need to do. Develop a telemetry strategy to provide a consistent approach and investment across states.
 - c. Potential for University and TAFE places for key skills shortage areas in the water sector as part of the Government's Fee Free TAFE and Stronger University System commitment.
3. Restoring transparency, integrity and confidence in water markets by releasing later this year the Water Markets Roadmap prepared by Daryl Quinlivan and amend legislation to prohibit market misconduct, introduce a mandatory code of conduct for water market intermediaries, and establish National Water Data Hub to provide accurate, real-time information.
4. Increasing First Nations ownership and involvement in decision-making.
 - a. Establishing an interim-first Nations Water Holder and include river rangers in the Government's commitment to increase the number of rangers to 3800 by 2029.
 - b. Working closely with your Ministerial colleagues on delivery of the \$40m Aboriginal Water Entitlements Program.
 - c. Establish an indigenous water roundtable by extending the current short-term Committee on Aboriginal Water Interests.
5. Updating the science to ensure the challenges of climate change can be accounted for in the 2026 review of the Basin Plan.
 - a. Outline current water - climate science being done under existing MDBA and CSIRO programs.
 - b. Identify mechanisms to protect towns during drought given the experiences in Stanthorpe, Walgett and Dubbo during last drought.

6. Additional opportunities that would require further consideration and development include:
 - a. Improve community and environmental outcomes in the Basin by adopting an outcome, rather than target, based focus for managing the Basin water resources. An outcomes-based focus will allow for a broader and more effective range of measures to be taken to improve the health of rivers and wetlands and will improve engagement of local communities over the long term.
 - b. Improving scientific advice on policies and actions necessary to support future water security by implementing a Basin water science strategy. A Basin water science strategy will bring together scientific advice on adapting and mitigating climate change impacts, improving water quality standards, improving sustainable groundwater management and identify innovative ways for providing water security in rural and remote communities.
 - c. At a broader strategic level, there is an opportunity to bring together the outcomes of the State of the Environment Report on freshwater resources and the challenges of managing the Murray-Darling Basin (as per the WESA review) under the Government's policy and narrative of Securing Australia's Water Future.
7. To deliver on these commitments it will be important to work closely with all levels of government, stakeholders, First Nations people, and your Ministerial colleagues responsible for regional development, agriculture, and infrastructure.



Australian Government
**Department of Agriculture,
Water and the Environment**

PDR: MB22-000313

To: Minister Plibersek

**ISSUE: SHIFTING THE NARRATIVE ON WATER RECOVERY IN THE MURRAY–
DARLING BASIN**

KEY POINTS

1. The Basin Plan is a climate adaptation tool to sustain the long-term health of Murray–Darling Basin rivers and wetlands.
2. Implementation of the plan was slow under the previous government.
3. A three-phased approach is proposed to shift the narrative over the next six months, during the operation of the taskforce:

Phase 1 - release of the WESA Report: reflect on the past and demonstrate the value of the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holders portfolio

Phase 2 – Budget: highlight the increasing risk to the environment and communities from climate change

Phase 3 – taskforce report: building support for the pathway forward

4. Further detail of draft messaging for shifting the narrative developed by your office is at **Attachment A**.

ATTACHMENT A: MINISTER’S OFFICE DRAFT NARRATIVE – Murray Darling Basin water recovery

Contact officer:	Rachel Connell First Assistant Secretary s. 22(1)(a)(ii)	Clearance officer: Date:	Rachel Connell 23/06/2022
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Attachment A

DRAFT NARRATIVE – Murray Darling Basin water recovery

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Department
<p>PHASE 1: ENVIRONMENTAL WATER WORKS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate change is impacting the health of the Basin and the viability of communities and agriculture. • Water that’s been recovered to help the environment is making a difference across the Basin. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ in 2018-19 it kept rivers in the northern Basin, that was in absolute dire straits, ticking over just long enough for natural flows to come in behind it ○ environmental water connected the Menindee Lakes through to the Murray on the Anabranch creating a fish super-highway ○ at the mouth of the Murray water for the environment has kept the river connected to the sea in 8 out 10 years (immediately after the millennium drought). • If we do nothing more we’ll achieve 61% of the Basin Plan flow indicators. Recovering the 450GL will increase that to 72% and relaxing constraints will deliver 94%. • That’s why we’re not giving up – we need to have as much water banked as we can if we are to manage future climate impacts. <p>PHASE 2: TASKFORCE AND SCIENCE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early release of Basin Outlook findings / highlight science – like NSW Climate Scenario modelling • (WG2AR6_FD_Ch11_Final (ipcc.ch)) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Climate change is projected to substantially reduce water resources in the MDB (high confidence). ○ The reforms have resulted in some substantive achievements. ○ Adapting MDB management to climate risks is an escalating challenge, with the projected decline in runoff being potentially greater than the water recovered for the environment. • State of the Environment Report

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- Without water for the environment, ecosystem decline over the recent drought period would have been even more severe (Productivity Commission)
- In the MDB - rivers and catchments are mostly in poor condition, and native fish populations have declined by more than 90% in the past 150 years.
- Taskforce communications

PHASE 3: PATH FORWARD

- Standing up programs



Australian Government
**Department of Agriculture,
Water and the Environment**

PDR: MB22-000314

To: Minister Plibersek

ISSUE: OPTIONS TO DELIVER THE '450' - ESTABLISHING A TASKFORCE**KEY POINTS**

- You are required to table the second statutory review of the Water for the Environment Special Account (WESA) within five days of Parliament sitting. The Government will be expected to respond immediately upon release of the review.
- It is proposed that you establish a taskforce to develop a practical roadmap to achieve the water recovery needed to deliver the Basin Plan. The Taskforce will work with Basin states and representative groups to provide the Minister options by the end of 2022 (21 weeks).
- To alleviate the risk of being accused of “yet another review”, the roadmap will be framed as working with Basin states to agree a plan of action. Your office will need to work closely with Basin state ministerial offices to support an agreed approach.
- The following will be in scope:
 - Recovering 450 GL water for the environment
 - Delivering supply and constraints measures
 - Bridging the gap to sustainable diversion limits
 - Increasing Indigenous water holdings
- The taskforce will be led by a First Assistant Secretary and include 15 staff drawn from the Water Division, Murray-Darling Basin Authority, the National Water Grid and the Commonwealth Environmental Water Office and include secondees from Basin States.

Engagement approach:

Segment	Ministerial Involvement	Engagement
Basin Ministers	High	Ministerial Council before taskforce reports
States	High	Set up forum and work program for duration of taskforce
Peak organisations	High	Bilateral meetings and roundtables
Regional representative bodies	Medium	Partner with Murray Darling Association (local government) to hold roundtables, caucus member ideas and views and provide sector view to taskforce
Basin communities	Low	Webinars (one towards the beginning and one towards the end), online survey, newsletter and media strategy (reports from roundtables, value of completing the Basin Plan)

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		Date:	23/06/2022



Australian Government
**Department of Agriculture,
Water and the Environment**

PDR: MB22-000315

To: Minister Plibersek

ISSUE: DELIVERING THE BASIN PLAN – DEMONSTRATING ACTION

KEY POINTS

With only two years to the 30 June 2024 deadline, it is important to demonstrate action and maintain momentum while the taskforce is preparing advice. The following actions can be implemented over the next six months under the Government's five-point plan:

1) **Delivering on water commitments**

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- **Continue to pursue the 450 GL** water recovery target by:
 - i) Continue the Off-Farm Efficiency Program – progress:
 - South Australian Marion Water Efficiency Project – \$2.7M recovering 0.13 GL
 - Victorian Lower Murray Water Efficiency Project – \$34.3M recovering 1.8 GL, including entitlements for First Nations
 - ii) Work with the Commonwealth's Drought Hubs and state primary industries agencies to establish on-farm efficiency programs

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2. Increasing compliance, metering and monitoring

- release draft Telemetry Strategy for consultation

3. Restoring transparency, integrity and confidence in water markets

- Release Water Markets Roadmap prepared by Daryl Quinlivan and commit to:
 - Water markets integrity legislation prohibiting market misconduct
 - Mandatory code of conduct for water market intermediaries
 - National Water Data Hub to provide accurate, real-time information

4. Increasing First Nations ownership and participation

- Include a First Nations member on governing committee for science investments
- Subject to legal advice, establish an interim-First Nations Water Holder mentored by the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder
- Include river rangers in the Government's commitment to increase the number of rangers to 3800 by 2029.

5. Updating the science

- Release current evidence on impacts of climate change in the Basin
- Announce university and TAFE places for key skills shortage areas in the water sector as part of the Government's Fee Free TAFE and Stronger University System commitments
- Commission an independent study into how climate change is likely to affect Ramsar sites across the Basin

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