

More Water to the Murray-Darling Basin

October 2012

On 26 October 2012 Prime Minister Julia Gillard announced that the Government is committed to return an additional 450 gegalitres (GL) of water to the Murray-Darling Basin, bringing the total amount of water returned to the river to 3200 GL. The additional water will benefit major wetlands across the basin and achieve greater environmental outcomes minimising the impact on communities through water recovery projects.

Furthermore, the Government announced that it will provide \$1.77 billion of extra funding over ten years from 2014, to deliver water-saving infrastructure and remove constraints in the system. South Australian Premier, Jay Weatherill, said the extra funding will help ensure no social or economic burden will be borne by the river communities. Of the extra funding, \$200 million will be spend on modifying infrastructure such as low lying bridges and undersized dam outlets that currently limit both the volume of the water that can flow through the river and the environmental uses to which it can be put.

The extra funding will be secured through a special account and advance appropriation which will be established through legislation that is expected to be introduced to Parliament before the end of the year. The Parliament will sit for that last time in 2012 on 29 November.

The Government's announcement can be seen as a win for South Australia, which throughout the consultation process has maintained that the initial target of 2,750 GL was not enough to meet the environmental water requirements in several regions of the basin, particularly the Coorong, Lower lakes and Murray Mouth. Premier Weatherill has been campaigning for the greater flow and there have been threats of High Court action from South Australia.

Press release is available [here](#)

Background

In October 2010, the Murray Darling Basin Authority released the Guide to the Proposed Murray Darling Basin Plan. This was followed by the Proposed Murray Darling Basin Plan in November 2011, which was a draft for the final Basin Plan due in late 2012.

Following the release of the proposed Basin Plan, a 20 week consultation period was held, which ended on Monday 16 April 2012. During this period, the Murray Darling Basin Authority received more than 10,000 submissions from Governments, communities, peak bodies, industry organisations and individuals.



Through their submissions, many of the basin state and territory governments criticised the proposed Basin Plan, however on different grounds. For example while the South Australian Government have maintained the target for water recovery as stated in the proposed Basin Plan, 2,750 GL per year, was too low, both the New South Wales and Victorian Government argued the target is too high.

Following the end of the consultation period, the Murray Darling Basin Authority released a revised draft of the proposed Basin Plan incorporating some of the key themes in the submission received in a revised plan.

The revised plan then entered the ministerial and parliamentary process, allowing all Basin ministers a six weeks consideration period.

After the six week consideration period, the revised Plan was submitted to the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities the Hon Tony Burke MP, for consideration.

To see Hawker Britton's Occasional Paper on the Murray Darling Basin Plan, [click here](#).

Next Step

The Minister is expected to table legislation before the end of 2012 and for the sustainable diversion limits to take effect from 2019. This will allow for the Basin states seven years to adapt and manage the change. The Minister will consult with Basin States before presenting the final plan to Parliament.

The Basin Plan Development Timetable

August 2007	<i>The Water Bill 2007</i> is passed through the House of Representatives and Senate, establishing the Murray Darling Basin Authority and mandating the development of the Basin Plan
March 2008	Commencement of the <i>Water Act 2007</i>
December 2008	<i>Water Amendment 2008</i> amends the <i>Water Act 2007</i> following the referral of powers from the Basin States
December 2008	Murray Darling Basin Authority assumes responsibility for all of the functions of the former Murray Darling Basin Commission
October 2010	<i>The Guide to the Proposed Murray Darling Basin Plan</i> is released
November 2011	<i>The Proposed Murray Darling Basin Plan</i> is released
April 2012	Public consultation on <i>the Proposed Murray Darling Basin Plan</i> ends
May 2012	The revised draft of <i>the Proposed Murray Darling Basin Plan</i> is released
August 2012	The Legislative and Governance Forum of the Murray Darling Basin considers the <i>Proposed Murray Darling Basin Plan</i>
Mid – Late 2012	The <i>Proposed Murray Darling Basin Plan</i> is considered by the Commonwealth Minister for Water
Late 2012	The Commonwealth Minister for Water tables the <i>Proposed Murray Darling Basin Plan</i> in the federal parliament