

Overview of the Murray–Darling Basin Plan

The Murray–Darling Basin Plan represents a historic agreement to manage the Murray–Darling Basin as one system.

The Basin Plan was developed by the Murray–Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) in 2012 to enact key elements of the Commonwealth *Water Act 2007*, and to help balance water for industries, communities and the environment. Six governments across the Murray–Darling Basin have reached bipartisan agreement on how to implement the plan.

Limits on water use

The Basin Plan outlines how much water can be taken from the Murray–Darling Basin, while leaving enough to maintain the health of rivers, lakes, and wetlands within the system. This volume is called the sustainable diversion limit (SDL).

The SDL aims to return 2,680 gigalitres of water to the environment. This target was adjusted from 2,750 gigalitres following the Northern Basin Review. An additional 450 gigalitres can also be recovered for the environment through efficiency measures that have neutral or positive socio-economic outcomes.

Sustainable diversion limits will take effect in NSW from 1 July 2019.

Bridging the gap

Returning water to the environment and achieving environmental outcomes can be achieved under the Basin Plan by:

- making more water available in the system through:
 - purchasing licences and allocating those to the environment
 - implementing infrastructure projects to reduce losses in water delivery and use (e.g. through piping and irrigation upgrades), which can be allocated to the environment
- adjusting the overall sustainable diversion limit to achieve equivalent environmental outcomes with less water by:
 - implementing supply projects that allow equivalent environmental outcomes to be achieved with less water. This includes environmental works, changes in river operations, and evaporation savings. The MDBA has determined that 605 gigalitres of the water to be recovered can be offset through supply measures
 - constraints projects that overcome some of the physical barriers that impact water delivery in the system. Constraints projects can include changes to physical features such as road crossings and bridges. They can also change river operating practices and rules.

There are 37 supply, efficiency and constraints projects across the Murray–Darling Basin, 21 of which are in NSW. States have until 2024 to deliver these projects.

Progress

More than 2,100 gigalitres has already been recovered across the Murray–Darling Basin, including more than 1,000 gigalitres recovered in NSW. An additional 286 gigalitres of offsets will be delivered in NSW through the sustainable diversion limit adjustment mechanism (SDLAM).

NSW has developed a package to deliver SDLAM projects, which will allow the delivery of the required environmental outcomes while allowing valuable water to stay in productive use. These projects have been endorsed by the Murray–Darling Basin Ministerial Council and the MDBA. Community consultation and project design will continue through 2019, and projects still require a

range of approvals before they can proceed. Some projects, such as the Living Murray program and the Nimmie-Caira project, are nearing completion or are already in place.

Water resource plans

The Basin States (Queensland, NSW, Victoria, South Australia and the ACT) are the frontline regulators of water take within their jurisdictions and are required under the Basin Plan to prepare water resource plans (WRPs) to set out:

- effective management and compliance with SDLs
- water sharing and trading rules
- environmental protection mechanisms
- objectives for water quality and salinity
- cultural water uses within the relevant WRP area.

The Basin Plan requires 33 WRPs be prepared across the Murray–Darling Basin¹. NSW is responsible for the development of 20, more than all other states combined.

Water sharing plans (WSPs) are currently the primary instruments for water sharing in NSW, and these will form a part of the broader WRPs. NSW Department of Industry is amending or replacing 31 WSPs to be consistent with Basin Plan requirements. NSW Office of Environment and Heritage is also developing nine long-term watering plans that WRPs must have regard to.

NSW released eight WRPs for public exhibition in late 2018. The remaining 12 will be released for consultation in 2019.

More information on the Basin Plan is available at:
mdba.gov.au/basin-plan/plan-murray-darling-basin

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¹ The Water Regulations 2008 under the Commonwealth's *Water Act 2007* allow the Commonwealth minister to grant an extension of up to ten months for a state to submit a WRP.