



COMMONWEALTH ENVIRONMENTAL WATER AND THE MURRAY-DARLING BASIN PLAN



The Murray-Darling Basin Plan is a high level framework for managing the Basin's water resources to better meet the needs of the environment, communities and industry in the Basin.

The Basin Plan sets environmentally sustainable limits on surface water and groundwater use in the Murray-Darling Basin. In order to implement these new limits, the Australian Government is recovering water to protect and restore the rivers, wetlands and floodplains of the Murray-Darling Basin. This water becomes part of Commonwealth's environmental water holdings, which as at 30 April 2013 had reached over 1,500 gigalitres (billion litres) of registered water entitlements. Information on the Australian Government's proposed approach to recovering the remaining water is provided in the Draft Environmental Water Recovery Strategy, available at www.environment.gov.au/water/policy-programs/water-recovery-strategy/index.html.

The final volume of water recovered for the environment is dependent on the outcome of two work programs that may either increase or decrease the surface water sustainable diversion limits; one to remove river system constraints and the other to improve the efficiency of environmental water delivery.

The Commonwealth's environmental water is managed by the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder, a position established under the *Water Act 2007* to make decisions on the use of the water for the benefit of the environment. The Commonwealth's holdings are managed in accordance with the environmental watering plan, which is part of the Basin Plan.

THE ENVIRONMENTAL WATERING PLAN

The environmental watering plan provides a framework for planning and coordinating environmental water use across the Basin. It includes:

- overall and particular environmental objectives, along with targets to measure progress against the objectives. All Commonwealth environmental water use must be consistent with these objectives.
- principles to be applied in environmental watering, covering three main areas - what environmental water use should seek to achieve, who environmental water managers should consult with, and practical issues environmental water managers need to consider when determining water use. All Commonwealth environmental watering is undertaken in accordance with these principles.
- development of a Basin-wide environmental watering strategy by the Murray-Darling Basin Authority by November 2014, as well as development of long-term watering plans at a catchment scale by Basin States. The strategy and plans will inform long-term portfolio management planning for Commonwealth environmental water.



- development of Basin and catchment-scale annual environmental watering priorities (developed by the Murray-Darling Basin Authority and state governments respectively). The Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder will have regard to these priorities when making portfolio management decisions on the water use. Further detail about how the Commonwealth Environmental Water Office makes decisions on water use, in a manner that is consistent with the requirements of the Basin Plan, is included in the *Framework for determining Commonwealth environmental water use*, available at www.environment.gov.au/ewater/publications/cewh-framework.html

COMMONWEALTH ENVIRONMENTAL WATER USE AND WATER QUALITY

The Basin Plan contains a number of water quality targets, relating to salinity, low dissolved oxygen and blue-green algae. The Commonwealth Environmental Water Office has regard to these targets when making decisions on water use.

An example of Commonwealth environmental water being delivered to help provide water quality benefits is provided at www.environment.gov.au/ewater/publications/ewater-helps-murray-factsheet.html

COMMONWEALTH ENVIRONMENTAL WATER TRADE AND THE BASIN PLAN

Commonwealth environmental water trading activities will be fully consistent with the water trading rules of the Basin Plan. For example, the Commonwealth Environmental Water Office will establish appropriate arrangements to ensure it is not in a position to benefit from market information before it is made public. No trade will be carried out before appropriate arrangements have been put in place.

MONITORING THE USE OF COMMONWEALTH ENVIRONMENTAL WATER

The Basin Plan contains a program for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the Basin Plan. This program outlines a number of principles which must be applied to monitoring and evaluation. These principles are reflected in the *Commonwealth Environmental Water - Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Improvement Framework*, available at www.environment.gov.au/ewater/publications/ewater-monitoring-evaluation.html

Monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement are critical components of natural resource management programs, particularly in highly variable natural systems where the outcomes from actions can be uncertain. Monitoring and evaluation supports the efficient and effective use of Commonwealth environmental water and will assist in demonstrating the environmental outcomes from watering activities.

SEEKING FURTHER INFORMATION?

Further information on the activities of the Commonwealth Environmental Water Office is available at www.environment.gov.au/ewater/index.html

For further information on the Basin Plan, visit www.mdba.gov.au



Cover photo: Red-kneed Dotterel, Macquarie Wetlands. Photo by David Straccione, CEWO