



Submission
Recommendations to the
Water Amendment
(Restoring our Rivers) Bill 2023

Murray Darling Association Inc.
Contact: Mark Lamb
Chief Executive Officer



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Executive Summary

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback to the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment, and Water, and the Federal Minister for the Environment and Water, Hon Tanya Plibersek MP, on the Water Amendment (Restoring Our Rivers) Bill 2023.

We acknowledge that the Water Amendment (Restoring Our Rivers) Bill 2023 at its heart, The Bill will support the implementation of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan and improve transparency and integrity of water markets in the Basin.

Following consultation with its members across the Murray-Darling Basin, the Murray Darling Association has provided 11 recommendations within this submission, addressing the following Bill's four key pillars of **More Time**, **More Options**, **More Funding**, and **More Accountability**.

The provided recommendations explore a diverse approach to the Water Amendment (Restoring our Rivers) Bill 2023 including:

- The implementation of the NSW Natural Resources Commission recommendations,
- Meeting water demands with less water,
- Reduce Non-Riparian Local Government reliance on the Murray-Darling Basin,
- Opportunities for water efficiency using On-Farm Efficiency Funds,
- Inclusion of Local Government in Dialogue and Planning,
- Public Quarterly Reporting by Governments
- Community Impacts, Reconciliation of the latest Science, and a Renewed focus on Actions,
- Maintaining the Triple Bottom Line Approach and Neutrality test,
- Legislating the volume of Floodplain Harvesting
- Progress Reporting on the Delivery of the 450GL Recovery Program
- Preparation and Approval of NSW Water Resource Plans



Introduction

The [Murray Darling Association](#) is the peak body representing Local Government across the Murray-Darling Basin, with our membership base divided into 12 separate regions in which Councils have common interests.

- Regions 1, 2, 3, and 4 represent councils in Victoria and New South Wales,
- Regions 5, 6, 7, and 8 represent councils in South Australia,
- Regions 9, 10, and 11 represent councils in New South Wales,
- Region 12 represents councils in Queensland.

Acknowledging the importance of water security in ensuring that the communities and industries within the Murray-Darling Basin (the Basin) remain sustainable, liveable, and can support the agricultural, horticultural, and infrastructure needs of Australia, improving the management of the Basin to secure a healthy sustainable river for future generations is a matter of concern to our members.

The Murray Darling Association has written the following submission relating to the Water Amendment (Restoring our Rivers) Bill 2023.

Context

- The Australian Government has introduced the Water Amendment (Restoring Our Rivers) Bill 2023.
- The Bill will support the implementation of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan and improve transparency and integrity of water markets in the Basin.
- The Murray–Darling Basin Plan is an agreement to restore and manage our water carefully to protect the Basin for future generations.
- The Plan is currently scheduled to conclude in 2024. In July 2023, the Murray-Darling Basin Authority advised that full implementation of the Murray–Darling Basin Plan would not be possible by 30 June 2024.
- In August 2023, an [agreement](#) was made between the Federal, New South Wales, South Australia, Queensland and Australian Capital Territory governments to deliver the Murray–Darling Basin Plan in full, including 450 gigalitres of water for the environment.
- The legislation sets out important changes to ensure the Murray-Darling Basin Plan is delivered in full and implement water market reforms in the Basin.
- Public submissions for the Water Amendment (Restoring Our Rivers) Bill 2023 opened 6 September 2023
- Public Submissions for the Water Amendment (Restoring Our Rivers) Bill 2023 close 29 September 2023
- More information on the Submission can be found [here](#).



More Time

The Murray Darling Association supports the timeframe extensions for the SDLAM projects until 31 Dec 2026 and the States ability to add new projects to the suit of packages to achieve the 605GL “downwater”, as well as the delivery of water infrastructure projects by 31 December 2023.

Stemming from engagement and consultation with its members over past years, the Murray Darling Association advocated for the Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council to extend the deadline dates for the more complex and integrated Sustainable Diversion Limited Adjustment Mechanism (SDLAM) projects. This recommendation was then also submitted to the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water following targeted workshops to review community ideas to deliver the Murray-Darling Basin Plan in the May – July 2023 period.

More Options

The Murray Darling Association acknowledges the need to diversify the available options to deliver the remaining water, including water efficiency infrastructure projects, and notes with concern from its members, the inclusion of voluntary water purchases as part of the water delivery options on the table.

Following consultation with its members across the Murray-Darling Basin, the Murray Darling Association proposes a diverse approach including the implementation of the NSW Natural Resources Commission recommendations, meeting water demands with less water, reducing Non-Riparian Local Government reliance on the Murray-Darling Basin, exploring opportunities for water efficiency using On-Farm Efficiency Funds, inclusion of Local Government in Dialogue and Planning, public quarterly reporting by Governments, Community Impacts, Reconciliation of the latest Science, and a Renewed focus on Actions, Legislating the volume of Floodplain Harvesting, Progress Reporting on the Delivery of the 450GL Recovery Program, Preparation and Approval of NSW Water Resource Plans and maintaining the Triple Bottom Line Approach and Neutrality test to the Murray-Darling Basin Plan to ensure the balance of social, economic and environmental concerns.

Refer to:

[\[Recommendation 1\]](#)

[\[Recommendation 2\]](#)

[\[Recommendation 3\]](#)

[\[Recommendation 4\]](#)

[\[Recommendation 5\]](#)

[\[Recommendation 6\]](#)

[\[Recommendation 7\]](#)

[\[Recommendation 8\]](#)

[\[Recommendation 9\]](#)

[\[Recommendation 10\]](#)

[\[Recommendation 11\]](#)



More Funding

Reviewing the Water Amendment (Restoring our Rivers) Bill 2023, the Murray Darling Association commends the approach to make more funding available to deliver the remaining water and acknowledge the Bill's intent to support communities where water purchasing has flow-on impacts.

Engaging with its members across the Northern and Southern Basin, the Murray Darling Association has proposed an approach focussing on reducing non-riparian Local Government's reliance on the Murray-Darling Basin and exploring opportunities for water efficiency using On-Farm Efficiency Funds.

Refer to:

[\[Recommendation 3\]](#)

[\[Recommendation 4\]](#)

More Accountability

The Murray Darling Association commends the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water's (DCCEEW) efforts to ensure more accountability measures for all Murray-Darling Basin governments including the Federal Government to deliver on their obligations.

The Murray Darling Association's Member base has proposed that the DCCEEW's efforts and goals in ensuring more accountability for all Basin governments could be benefitted from the focus on including Local Government in Dialogue and Planning, Public quarterly reporting by Governments, as well as maintaining the Triple Bottom Line Approach and Neutrality test to the Murray-Darling Basin Plan to ensure the balance of social, economic and environmental concerns.

Refer to:

[\[Recommendation 5\]](#)

[\[Recommendation 6\]](#)

[\[Recommendation 8\]](#)



Recommendations

Recommendation 1 NSW Natural Resources Commission Recommendations

Objective:

The one consistently missing action in water management across NSW has been the setting of extraction limits, required under the Water Act 2007 (Cth) to protect the water source as well as downstream communities, stock and domestic and town water quality and availability.

In March the Natural Resources Commission released Issues Briefs on consistent issues in water management - notably the lack of Long Term Average Annual Extraction Limits which must be set in each Water Sharing Plan and still have not been.

Unless and until NSW introduce LTAAELs (beginning with areas at high risk of currently being above sustainable limits), the Darling-Baaka will continue to miss out on the low- and moderate floods it used to enjoy and compounding water scarcity issues like recent fish kills, low dissolved oxygen and high nutrient levels (including nitrogen and phosphorous) will continue the demise of the "...ecosystem in crisis" as the Darling-Baaka was described by NRC in 2019.

Without LTAAELs, water management is a guessing game, and one easily skewed against protection of the water source, to the detriment of many important wetlands and especially end of system regions like Wilcannia, Menindee and Wentworth Shire.

Recommendation 1: The urgent implementation of all recommendations from the NSW Natural Resources Commission in relation to Long Term Average Annual Extraction Limits, per Issues Briefs 1 and 2 (attached).



Recommendation 2 Meeting Water Demands with less Water

Objective:

To assess the stressors of

- Climate Change and the predicted reduction in rainfall
- Extremely variable rainfall predictions, leading to more droughts.
- Increasing population growth drawing on MDB water
- Increasing agricultural demand (to meet the 100-billion-dollar production target by 2030)

To continue to deliver these water demands:

- A minimum 1850 GL/2750 GL to SA and total current water demands across the Murray-Darling Basin
- A minimum 450 GL to SA

Or suffer significant impacts on

- Sea water incursion
- Meeting sufficient water for
 - Human needs
 - Cultural demands
 - Environment
 - Agricultural production and Mining

There are multiple increasing reasons for reduced water in the Murray Darling Basin, whilst demand is growing, creating even more significant impacts if insufficient Murray Darling water is available. These include the reduced rainfall due to climate change, allowing the effects of predicted sea-level rise to the Lower Murray and making meeting the 450 GL target more complex. All these must be built into the current Basin Plan, extended to 2027, and the Basin Plan 2.0 review.

The reviewed Basin plan needs to compensate for less rainfall, and guarantee flows through the barrages to push seawater out.

Suppose the review does not consider these issues properly. In that case, the downstream Basin communities will be harshly impacted by seawater incursion or not meeting water for environmental, cultural and human needs.

Recommendation 2: That the Murray Darling Basin Plan 2.0 address meeting water demands with less water.



Recommendation 3 Reduce Non-Riparian Local Government reliance on the Murray-Darling Basin.

Objective:

To release funds quarantined for River Murray Licence holders for any user of River Murray water to improve Local Government's ability to reduce reliance on piped, potable, and River Murray water for township use, such as watering reserves and parks and managing stormwater to expand vegetation and biodiversity through Water Sensitive Urban Design and Stormwater capture and reuse schemes.

This recommendation makes all Australian communities more resilient in the face of Climate Change.

Background:

The Off-Farm Efficiency Program is closed, with large amounts of untapped money available, with very few funded projects in operation and many mega-litres of water savings to be exploited.

Key Arguments:

Only Local Governments with a water licence can access the Off-Farm Efficiency Program funds to improve water efficiency and reduce their reliance on the River Murray. However, many users who use River Murray water through the SA Water supply (and similar elsewhere) could also use these funds and reduce the draw on the Murray Darling Basin.

Regional Councils are in an excellent position to improve the quality and quantity of water in the River and their environment. However, they need more resources and knowledge to implement the best options. Both are in much greater abundance in the City Councils.

The situation remains normal and unchanged, and funding bodies do not appreciate opportunities. Regional Councils should be seen in a different light than City Councils, with a greater ratepayer base, smaller area, and little public land to manage.

Background and supporting information:

Water Sensitive Urban Design (WSUD): Stormwater is rainwater that falls onto roads or roofs and often contains chemicals, sediment, or pollutants. Water sensitive urban design (WSUD) is an approach to planning and designing urban areas to use this valuable resource and reduce the harm it causes to our rivers and creeks.

WSUD is expanding significantly in City councils through education, resources, knowledge, and awareness of the impacts of stormwater on rivers and the sea from sediment, chemicals, and nutrients.

WSUD is not widely adopted in regional Councils due to the need to understand the gains that can be made through its implementation. These include reducing pollution to receiving waters, reducing stress on stormwater infrastructure, allowing more vegetation, trees, and biodiversity, and using water where it falls rather than pumping, watering, and managing stormwater where no drainage infrastructure exists. The other impediment is knowledge by civil infrastructure staff, engineers, and planners to look for opportunities and what works best for a particular situation.

Regional Local Governments need opportunities to learn about WSUD, costs, benefits, applications, and outcomes to use this technology in their townships. Funded training through WaterSensitiveSA and similar groups and on-the-job uses would go a long way to progressing its use. This is the



experience of the Rural City of Murray Bridge, which now uses WSUD to increase vegetation, solve troublesome stormwater problems and reduce the draw on the River Murray.

Stormwater Harvesting and Reuse: Harvesting stormwater for reuse through an existing reticulated network is a way of drought-proofing a township during dry periods and expanding the park and reserve network by making more water available throughout the year. These are much larger infrastructure projects requiring significant engineering, treatment, and distribution works and, therefore, need State and Australian government funding to be possible. On this scale, townships can significantly improve aesthetics, cool their urban locations with green areas not supported via existing networks, withstand predicted lower rainfall due to climate change, and directly contribute to achieving the outcomes of the MDB Plan.

Recommendation 3: To release funds to non-riparian Local Governments for engineering solutions to reduce reliance on the Murray-Darling Basin. For example, the Off-Farm Efficiency Program is only available where a water licence exists, and water can be returned directly to the River. However, many Councils utilise SA Water from the River Murray but still need a water license to use the program.



Recommendation 4 Opportunities for water efficiency using On-Farm Efficiency Funds

Objective:

Use the funds available for On-Farm Efficiency programs for users who do not access River Murray directly (using a water licence) but use SA Water potable water derived from the River Murray. As these communities and properties do not own a water licence, they are not eligible for these funds as they do not hold a water licence to trade back to the MDBA.

Significant unspent funds are available for water efficiency measures limited to those with water licences. However, many users access River Murray water via SA Water infrastructure, which could add water-saving infrastructure and reduce their demand on SA Water and the River Murray.

Recommendation 4:

a) That the National Water Infrastructure Grid and the Australian Government fund opportunities for water efficiency using On-Farm Efficiency Funds.

b) Opportunities to reduce demand on SA Water supplied water derived from the River Murray for Upper Southeast South Australia Stock and Domestic water use.



Recommendation 5 Inclusion of Local Government in Dialogue and Planning

Objective:

The recommendation aims to ensure that local councils are included from the get-go in discussions about Basin Plan projects in their areas, including discussions between state or federal governments and third parties, such as irrigation companies, and that these discussions are undertaken in a spirit of co-operation, collaboration, openness, and full transparency.

The beneficiaries would be local communities, local economies and local environments as councils have a wide mandate to steward the triple bottom line, as opposed to some parties whose drivers can be narrow and often led by self-interest.

Key Arguments:

Federal and State Government and Irrigation Companies are often working in isolation with projects and initiatives and are not sharing the information about these proposals with other stakeholders including local government.

This issue therefore heightens concern over the lack of opportunity and timeliness for local communities and local councils to receive and give information or feedback and be involved in discussion around proposed water savings projects.

There will continue to be a lack of transparency, communication, and co-operation in terms of water savings projects and potential negative effects from decisions that may in turn badly impact communities.

Further, there will be lost opportunities to collaborate early to hone ideas so that outcomes are genuinely a win-win for all concerned, including the community, the economy, and the environment.

A more collaborative, open, and transparent way forward for discussing, understanding, and assessing water savings projects rather than any one stakeholder influencing decisions that aren't necessarily in the best interests of the greater good.

Recommendation 5: That local councils, as elected representative of local communities and stewards of local social, economic, and environmental health and wellbeing, be routinely included in dialogue and planning related to the implementation of the Murray Darling Basin Plan in their areas, including government dialogue with third parties, and that this engagement be timely, transparent, authentic, and meaningful.



Recommendation 6 Public Quarterly Reporting by Governments

Objective:

Regular reporting of progress of projects. Who would benefit from this motion?

The whole region including the triple bottom line framework of economic, social, and environmental considerations.

Key Arguments:

Concern that SDLAM projects are not being adequately or properly funded and that current understanding is that approved projects are well behind in being completed.

There will be a continuation of a lack of reporting on projects regardless of the deadline.

Regions will have a far better understanding of the progress of programs and what needs to be undertaken to achieve completion within the deadlines.

Recommendation 6: That respective Governments to report publicly on a quarterly basis progress to finalise and submit SDLAM projects to appropriate agencies for certification and implementation as per the deadline as determined by the Federal Government Minister for Water.



Recommendation 7 Community Impacts, Reconciliation of the latest Science, and a Renewed focus on Actions

Objective:

The Bill as it stands seriously risks taking Basin Communities to an economic tipping point from which they will never recover and, arguably, for no good reason other than chasing recovery targets modelled over 10 years ago that may not even be relevant or required today. The consequences to the nation, let alone local communities, has not been fully/properly investigated and understood. It would be irresponsible to change legislation to the extent proposed without first doing a comprehensive review of the Plan informed by the latest science (environmental, social, economic, cultural) and a full assessment of the range of alternative levers that could contribute to healthier river systems (beyond just adding water).

Basin communities, including communities that are significant contributors to Australia's farming sector / food security and that support associated value adding industries (many of which are major export earners for the nation) would benefit greatly from actioning this Recommendation.

Key Arguments:

The Bill effectively removes the cap on water buybacks, commits fully to recovering the 450ML of "upwater", including through buybacks, and removes the socio-economic neutrality testing in favour of 'minimising' economic impacts by way of "funding for community adjustment assistance". These one-off "adjustment assistance" actions by governments are tokenistic at best and fail to recognise the considerable and perpetual contribution of agriculture and manufacturing to regional and national economies. "Adjustment assistance" is never ongoing and is a serious risk to local economies, especially in irrigation communities of which there are many across the Basin states. It should not be forgotten that water recovery has already cost an estimated 10,000 jobs across Basin communities and it would be foolish of Basin communities to sit by and watch while further jobs are eroded.

It is noted that the Basin Plan has already recovered 2100GL for the environment (4 Sydney Harbours) and that the CEWH and EWAGs across the Basin have recognised and celebrated many environmental success stories as a result of increased environmental watering. Presenting the Plan as a failure to date is plain wrong – there is more to celebrate than criticise. Today, towns, industries and agriculture across the Basin only access 28% of inflows, meaning what is left for the environment is well within globally accepted standards for water diversions. There is also no point in recovering further water when delivery of the current volumes of environmental water remains constrained. It's important to not act rashly but instead take a considered and intelligent approach to further policy or legislative change, ideally via a full review of the Basin Plan done in genuinely consultation with all stakeholders.

The Bill chases water recover numbers based on 10-year-old models and ignores the latest science about what will truly help rivers recover the most. The Bill ignores the existing inability of the CEWH to use what water it already has and doggedly chases water recovery for the environment without properly exploring the economic impacts on local communities and the nation. There are many other ways to achieve healthier rivers that need priority attention – these include:

- Improved river operations that could free up more discretionary water for the environment.
- Improved recognition of the effects of private partnerships, such as private property wetlands that are estimated to be 93% of wetlands) and private watering arrangements with the CEWH.
- Improved fish programs including introduction of trialled carp herpes to address degradation of in-stream habitat; fish ladders / fish passage projects at weirs such as Menindee, Balranald, and Mildura; as well as expanded fish screening programs.



- Further modernisation programs in irrigation districts (including private districts)
- Investigating alternative (temporary) market solutions for environmental water when absolutely necessary (instead of permanently depleting the consumptive pool)
- Investigating local community / council environmental programs using available water and wastewater

There are already several alternatives projects being proposed to help achieve sustainable diversion adjustment targets – such as the Murrumbidgee Optimisation Program and Reconnected (Murray) Floodplains Project. It is good that the legislation change will open up an opportunity for their inclusion instead of restricting projects to those tabled some years ago.

Members of the Murray Darling Association, during consultations have indicated that, in the Bill's current form, there is a real risk of Farmers in distress (such as wine grape farmers in 2023) will immediately sell their water to the government for a premium rate, reducing the amount of water available in the productive pool. This will negatively impact farming outputs as well as the viability of irrigation schemes and value adding processing industries, many of which are major employers and major contributors to Australian export earnings.

Buybacks will prevail at the expense of local communities and the Australian economy, and opportunities for win-win outcomes that deliver healthier rivers using alternative strategies to water recovery will have been lost.

Closing the door to new options to achieve Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment projects will increase the risk of further buybacks, reducing water availability in the consumptive pool and, ultimately, restricting Australia's ability to achieve its agricultural strategic goals.

It is the Murray Darling Association's belief that, supporting this recommendation would ensure that communities across the Basin won't be blindsided by quick fix populist legislation that is very likely to leave them economically distressed — the rhetoric of 'minimising economic impacts' is vastly different to genuinely ensuring socio-economic neutrality.

If this recommendation is successfully executed, Basin communities will benefit from intelligent, properly informed policy that seeks win-win outcomes focussed on the real goals (healthy rivers and a healthy environment), not the means (water recovery / buybacks). Importantly, Basin communities will be partners in co-creating any new legislation so that its implications are thoroughly understood and embraced by all concerned before being enshrined in legislation.

Recommendation 7: That the Department of Climate Change, Environment and Water:

- **Review and acknowledge the shift to 'minimising social economic impacts' from what was previously a commitment to full socio-economic neutrality testing, and the effects this may have on agriculture, irrigation, and communities,**
- **Undertake an urgent reconciliation of the latest science, global best practice, environmental achievements, and new ideas to inform an intelligent review of the Basin Plan in collaboration with local communities.**
- **Engage in a renewed focus on actions that will provide the greatest environmental returns for rivers.**



Recommendation 8 Maintaining of the Triple Bottom Line Approach

Objective:

A reinstatement of the Triple Bottom Line Approach, as when it is applied to the Murray-Darling Basin Plan (MDBP), balances the needs of the present as well as the future.

That is, the Triple Bottom Line Approach considers all options for water savings projects and initiatives that will deliver positive outcomes and not compromise current and future social, economic and environmental objectives.

All Basin communities would applaud the reinstatement of the Triple Bottom Line Approach as it has been previously stated by the Federal Government to be a commitment to communities; substantially aimed at providing communities a more certain and sustainable future.

Key Arguments:

The Federal Water Minister recently brokered a deal with states other than Victoria to re-write the MDBP, allowing for the widespread resumption of water buybacks in an effort to meet the water saving targets.

It is reminded that in 2018 Basin Water Ministers agreed water buybacks could not be used to meet the environmental water-saving targets because of the potential socio-economic harm they would cause to communities.

The recent amendment Bill with its specific inclusion that allows the Federal Government to buyback licences effectively ends the potential for any success of a Triple Bottom Line Approach.

There will be a heightened risk to certainty and sustainability for communities in the Murray Darling Basin and a negative impact on the Australian economy as Farmers and Businesses in the Basin area will be severely impacted.

The opportunity is here and now to send the Commonwealth Government a message that there is grave concern for the future of the Basin communities unless there is an accepted focus and effort to promote a Triple Bottom Line Approach towards implementing the MDBP.

If the Triple Bottom Line Approach is not reinstated and NSW follows Victoria in their stance, this will have a deleterious effect on the total Murray Darling Basin Plan, effectively sidelining efforts for a collegiate approach to completing critical environment and infrastructure projects, and potentially a divide in water implementation policy.

If this recommendation is positive in its impact, it will mean a return to the previously and widely supported Triple Bottom Line Approach and therefore a fair and equitable plan with potential balance between all the concerns around social, economic and environmental impacts of the MDBP.

Recommendation 8: Ensuring the maintenance of the Triple Bottom Line Approach and the Neutrality test to the Murray-Darling Basin Plan to ensure the balance of social, economic and environmental concerns.



Recommendation 9 Legislating the volume of Floodplain Harvesting

Objective:

This motion is endeavouring to protect the environmental, ecological, social integrity of the lands and communities along the Rivers where unregulated floodplain harvesting has led to and exacerbated unprecedented low rivers and drought.

Key Arguments:

The communities' lands and first peoples along the River Systems in the Murray Darling Barka Basin would benefit from a healthy reliable access to water and its amenity.

There is a belief, matched by the unprecedented development since the Water Act was implemented in 2007, that ongoing growth and extraction is possible. This belief is bolstered through multiple wet years. A consideration of the risks already existing needs assessment because of the variability and ephemerality in Australian Rivers. A deeper engagement with outcomes of Climate Change is a necessary consideration if water intakes into the system become even more variable.

Recently the NSW ICAC called out the failure of water policy in NSW as being “unruly focused on the interests of the irrigation industry” over the rights of other users. Without intervention this unacceptable situation will continue.

Troy Grant Inspector General of Water Compliance Stated at the MDBA River Reflections forum in Mildura on the 2 of June this Year. NSW's level of accountability under the Basin Plan is not equal to that of other Basin states and the territory, each of which have accredited WRPs.

Inaction on this introduces the risks, that the water sector will again ignore multiple volumes of evidence proving mismanagement, single mindedness, and lack of engagement. The sector must intervene and not let an amoral market dictate what a finite connected system can endure through unprecedented growth and the looming reality of climate change.

This recommendation would ensure there is a balanced view within the Basin Rivers. Considering sustainable horticulture and agriculture, flow and connectivity within the system and a deeper engagement with climate change and climate mitigation.

Recommendation 9: That Basin Governments legislate the volume of floodplain harvesting to the 1995 Cap for the protection and environmental integrity of Northern NSW, Southern Queensland Rivers, and Barwon Darling Barka Rivers.



Recommendation 10 Progress Reporting on the Delivery of the 450GL Recovery Program

Objective:

To provide current, accurate, clear, precise, and simple to follow, updates from all jurisdictions to show the progress in Water Efficiency Measures projects.

Background:

The Basin Plan includes a provision for up to 450 GL/y additional water recovery separate from the gap bridging target. This is for enhanced environmental outcomes on the condition that there are neutral or positive socio-economic impacts from the water recovery.

According to the former Department of Agriculture, Water and Environment website, 426.1 GL/y remains to be found, with no reporting or certainty on achieving when, where or how this water.

Upfront and verified data on the progress of these projects gives all Regions of the Murray-Darling Basin confidence in the Basin Plan, the regional and State Plans and the ability to meet the targets set.

Key Arguments:

This motion intends to find and report on the progress of the Water Efficiency Measures projects to meet the target of 450 GL/y.

Apart from the publication of the Second Review of the Water for the Environment Special Account: December 2021 for the Commonwealth Minister for Water Resources, no other timely or current reporting on this issue is available.

There are numerous pages on both websites describing efficiency measures generally, with no links to state plans and the efficiency projects and how much water is planned to be recovered or recovered to date. Both sites refer to each other for more information as well as to State Government websites, which also do not provide detailed plans or results. A comprehensive report is, however, available on the completion of the savings from South Australia.

The lack of progress in meeting the 450 GL/y is compounded by the limited information available about the plans and progress.

Actioning this recommendation would increase confidence in the reporting mechanism of the Murray Darling Basin Authority and Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water to deliver on the Basin Plan.

Recommendation 10: That the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water publishes clear, simple, timely, and accurate reporting to show progress on the delivery of the 450 GL Recovery Programs



Recommendation 11 Preparation and Approval of NSW Water Resource Plans

Objective:

For the Water Minister to request the MDBA to prepare all outstanding NSW Water Resource Plans for approval by the Minister to deliver the outcomes of the MDBP. This will ensure that the environment, human needs, industrial, agricultural, cultural, native title, town water supply and stock and domestic needs of riparian landowners along the length of the river are provided for, as a priority, during extended dry periods.

Background:

NSW is three years behind the second deadline set by the Australian Government for the completion and approval of the Water Resource Plans required to deliver the agreed outcomes of the Murray Darling Basin Plan. Without these plans, the promised water cannot be delivered and the industrial, human and environmental components of the MDB will suffer further. These plans are legislated to be implemented by 2024. The Australian Government Water Minister is empowered within the Water Act 2007, Section 68[1] to request the MDBA to prepare Water Resource Plans upon meeting particular conditions, such as where no current or temporary Water Resource Plan exists.

Recommendation 11: That the MDA call on the Australian Water Minister to set final submission dates and apply Section 68 of the Water Act 2007 for the Murray Darling Basin Authority to prepare and approve the New South Wales Water Resource Plans as required by the Murray Darling Basin Plan, in line with all other Basin States and Territories.

