



Australian Government



MURRAY-DARLING
BASIN AUTHORITY

Senator Susan McDonald
Chair
Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Senator

On 23 October 2020, I appeared as a witness before the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee Estimates hearing.

I wish to correct two answers that I gave at the hearing.

Correction #1

Regarding the number of water resource plans assessed by the Murray-Darling Basin Authority, Senator Patrick said (page 61 of the proof Hansard):

“That’s for all of them?”

In response I said (page 61 of the proof Hansard):

“Yes, all 36”

I wish to correct this answer. Following amendments to the *Basin Plan 2012* (the Basin Plan) in 2018, the total number of water resource plans to be prepared under the Basin Plan is 33.

Correction #2

Regarding the calculation of baseline diversion limits and sustainable diversion limits under the *Basin Plan 2012*, Senator Patrick, Mr Dan Blacker and I had the following exchange (page 62 of the proof Hansard):

Senator Patrick: The MDBA is on the record as saying, 'Once this is sorted out'—the flood plain harvesting—'the BDL and SDL will be increased to reflect new volume amounts.' Will that require a change to the Basin Plan?

Mr Blacker: No. The Basin Plan allows for better evidence to come forward in relation to baseline diversion limits. So, those provisions already exist within the plan.

Senator Patrick: I know that the vote that we had in the Senate in relation to the SDLs, for example, or changing things after the Northern Basin Review, the 70 gigalitres, required an amendment of legislation. So, you're now suggesting the BDLs and SDLs can change without a change of legislation?

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Mr Goodes: I think that the definition of the BDL in the plan does not require any amendment because it's just a better interpretation. However, because that then impacts the SDL, my understanding is that, yes, to effectively change the number of the SDL does amend the Basin Plan.

Senator Patrick: That was my understanding from the legislation we've passed already, which, for the record, I voted against. What would be the timing of that amendment?

Mr Goodes: There are 20 water resource plans undergoing assessment at the moment. Depending on how many sorts of amendments there are, it's not something I have an answer to at this point, Senator, I'm sorry.

Senator Patrick: You don't have a rough feel for the timing of it?

Mr Goodes: No.

I wish to correct the part of my answer that is underlined in the above extract. Baseline diversion limits (BDLs) and sustainable diversion limits (SDLs) are not static figures. BDLs are determined by reference to a description in Schedule 3 of the Basin Plan. SDLs are determined by reference to a formula in Schedule 2 of the Basin Plan. To change BDL descriptions or the SDL formula would require an amendment to the Basin Plan.

However, BDL estimates can (and are) updated as better information becomes available. As the SDL formula relies on the relevant BDL as an input, where BDL estimates are updated, so will the corresponding SDL.

The remainder of my answers given at the hearing are correct.

I apologise for these errors and trust this further information will be of assistance to the Committee.

Yours faithfully

Tim Goodes
Executive Director
Murray-Darling Basin Authority
27 November 2020