



## Office of the Chief Executive

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Glenn Worthington  
Committee Secretary  
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Regional Australia  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Worthington

I am writing in response to your letter of 1 June 2012 seeking comment on the terms of reference for the inquiry into certain matters relating to the proposed Murray-Darling Basin Plan.

The Murray-Darling Basin Authority's current position on two of the matters included in the terms of reference is summarised below, and further details are available in the Proposed Basin Plan Consultation Report that was released on 28 May 2012. A copy of this report is enclosed.

**The potential role that new environmental works and measures projects could play in partially offsetting sustainable diversion limit (SDL) reductions under the Basin Plan, focussing particularly on prospective project proposals identified by state governments and community interests**

The Authority strongly supports the exploration of opportunities for more efficient river operations, including through environmental works and measures. Targeted works and measures can play a part in achieving better environmental outcomes with a given volume of water and, in some cases, might enable an adjustment to the SDLs.

The Basin Officials Committee is developing the Murray-Darling River Management Review Work Program, which will include a review of projects that could improve the environmental condition of rivers and wetlands. The work program will provide opportunities for proposals to be brought forward by the state governments and local communities. The Authority will consider such proposals in future assessments of the volume of water needed to meet environmental requirements across the Basin.

Both the work program and the legal mechanisms for making SDL adjustments are currently under consideration by the Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council.

For further information, please see pages 162–166 of the enclosed report.

## **Groundwater SDLs for the Basin in the revised proposed Basin Plan**

There was a significant reaction to the groundwater SDLs put forward in the draft Basin Plan that was released in November 2011, with many stakeholders expressing concern that groundwater limits were too high or that surface water-groundwater connectivity issues were not well enough understood.

In response, the Authority carried out further assessments and convened a workshop of groundwater experts prior to finalising the groundwater SDLs for the revised proposed Basin Plan. The workshop was tasked with reviewing the Authority's assessment of the groundwater SDLs and the potential risks to surface water given the lack of available data on some aquifers in the Basin. After reviewing the assessment and supporting evidence from the expert workshop, the Authority reduced the total groundwater SDLs from 4340 GL/y to 3184 GL/y. This reduction reflects concerns over data quality and will substantially ameliorate the risk of surface water impacts resulting from groundwater pumping. We consider that both the groundwater SDLs in the revised plan and our approach to the risk factors are conservative.

Please see pages 45–50 of the attached report for further details.

The Murray-Darling Basin Authority is not able to provide comment on progress to date in water recovery toward bridging the gap by 2019 as this is managed by the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities.

I can confirm the Murray-Darling Basin Authority's attendance at the public hearing from 9:30am to 11:30 am on Wednesday 20 June 2012.

Yours sincerely

Rhondda Dickson  
Chief Executive

14 / 6 / 2012