

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

3.53 The committee recommends that no further reductions in water entitlements occur until the Northern Basin review, and any subsequent assessments, have been completed.

3.54 The committee recommends that the review should also consider alternative means of water recovery, particularly in the Condamine-Balonne catchment, in order to minimise the economic and social impact of the Plan in the Northern Basin. This would include consideration of the following options:

- recovery of water upstream of Beardmore Dam;
- use of private storages to more efficiently store environmental water and reduce evapotranspiration (the sum of evaporation and plant transpiration) losses;
- implementation of environmental works and measures to more efficiently deliver environmental water to key environmental assets; and
- temporary trade of water to make best use of Commonwealth water assets when environmental needs have been met.

Recommendation 2

3.55 The committee recommends that the Murray-Darling Basin Authority, as part of its ongoing social and economic work, undertake and publish a thorough assessment of the estimated and actual social and economic impacts of the implementation of the Plan, including of pursuing the remaining water recovery for the Condamine-Balonne catchment and other similarly distressed areas.

Recommendation 3

3.68 The committee recommends that the MDBA address the existing over-recovery in the Macquarie Valley and other ‘terminal’ systems such as the Gwydir Valley, with a view to limiting recovery to amounts which address valley-specific environmental needs.

Recommendation 4

3.99 The committee recommends that federal and state governments examine options for securing Broken Hill's water supply as recommended by the Broken Hill City Council, including raising the trigger point for releases, and improving infrastructure and storage at Menindee Lakes.

Recommendation 5

3.100 The committee recommends that an environmental watering plan be developed for the Menindee Lakes, provided that Adelaide's water supply and that of South Australian irrigators and landholders dependent on the Murray, is secure (see paragraph 3.197).

Recommendation 6

3.143 The committee recommends the Commonwealth assume liability for damage to private property from environmental watering events, including to both landholders and third parties, except to parties who have given prior consent to such flooding.

Recommendation 7

3.144 The committee recommends that the MDBA and state governments address the issue of third party impacts from environmental watering events during the development of constraints proposals, and clearly communicate with landholders who are likely to be affected by such events.

Recommendation 8

3.146 The committee recommends that the MDBA review its communication methods, particularly with regard to projects still in development such constraints proposals, and improve its ability to incorporate the views of communities and landholders into decisions and reports.

Recommendation 9

3.179 The committee recommends the federal government work with the Victorian government to ensure adequate accountability and scrutiny of the Goulburn Murray Water Connections Project, by initiating a judicial inquiry into the operation of the Goulburn Murray Water Connections Project. Further, given the use of Commonwealth funds on the project, the committee recommends the Australian National Audit Office should consider an audit of the project.

Recommendation 10

3.200 The committee recommends the government evaluate the effect on irrigators and the environment of the SA government purchasing irrigation water on the water market while declining to use its desalination plant. The committee also recommends the government undertake a study of the cost of upgrading pipeline delivery of water to irrigators and livestock owners on both sides of the lower lakes.

Recommendation 11

3.274 The committee recommends that Bird Island be removed by the South Australian Government and MDBA to improve water flow through the Murray mouth.

Recommendation 12

3.275 The committee recommends the MDBA calculate the economic value of fresh water evaporated from the lower lakes.

Recommendation 13

3.277 The committee recommends the government undertake a detailed study to inform whether a reassessment of the Coorong's Ramsar listing from a fresh water system to an estuarine system is more appropriate.

Recommendation 14

3.284 The committee recommends the government undertake cost-benefit analyses of the following options for adapting the management of the Lower Lakes and Coorong, and their social, economic and environmental impacts throughout the basin:

- removing all of the barrages;
- removing some of the barrages;
- modifying some of the barrages (such as Tauwitcherie and Mundoo);
- allowing the ingress of salt water into the Lower Lakes during periods of low flow; and
- investigating the construction of an additional lock at a location above Lake Alexandrina, such as near Wellington, SA, either in concert with the above options or as a single change.

3.285 Should such analysis indicate that one or more of these leads to more positive social, economic and environmental outcomes than the current basin plan, the committee recommends the Plan be amended accordingly.

Recommendation 15

3.311 The committee recommends the government commission an independent feasibility and hydrology study into a connector between Lake Albert and the Coorong to assess the environmental and economic costs and benefits of the connector, and compare this to the current practice of lake cycling.

Recommendation 16

3.328 The committee recommends the government direct the Productivity Commission to investigate the value of foregone production and food processing due to reduced irrigation water under the Plan.

Recommendation 17

3.339 The committee recommends that the government assess the operation of the Snowy Mountains Hydro-electric Scheme to determine the priority of irrigation and energy production.

Recommendation 18

3.340 The committee recommends the operation of the scheme be assessed, and adjusted as required, to give more effect to social, economic and environmental considerations of local and downstream communities.

Recommendation 19

4.5 The committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government request the Productivity Commission to undertake a full cost-benefit analysis of the Murray Darling Basin Plan.

Recommendation 20

4.22 The committee recommends that state governments make every effort to promote SDL Adjustment Mechanism projects in their jurisdiction to achieve the 650GL target.

Recommendation 21

4.35 The committee recommends that no further buybacks of water occur and that action to recover the additional 450GL of water through efficiency measures is delayed until the SDL Adjustment Mechanism target is met and the socio-economic impacts of water recovery to date are known.

Recommendation 22

4.81 The committee recommends that the government investigate the costs and benefits of a real-time national water trading register, and whether private platforms provide or can complement such arrangements.

Recommendation 23

4.112 The committee recommends that the government coordinate with the basin state governments to undertake a comprehensive assessment of carryover rules and regulations and investigate the potential for amendment of the rules.

Recommendation 24

4.125 The committee recommends the government assess, objectively value and publish data on the various uses of water in the Murray-Darling Basin.

Recommendation 25

4.150 The committee recommends that the government amend the Water Act 2007 to make clear the equal standing of economic, social and environmental needs and outcomes.

Recommendation 26

4.210 The committee recommends that the MDBA, Commonwealth Environment Water Holder and basin states conduct greater monitoring, objective evaluation and communication of environmental watering activities, and that the MDBA collate and publicly report this information.

Recommendation 27

4.212 The committee recommends that the government fund the expansion of the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder's existing Long Term Intervention Monitoring Project to include more sites around the basin and provide greater monitoring and evaluation of basin environmental watering activities.

Recommendation 28

4.253 The committee recommends the Victorian and NSW governments, as operators of the relevant storages, implement measures to mitigate cold water pollution that is undermining recovery efforts of native fish.

Recommendation 29

4.254 The committee recommends the MDBA conduct a review of the impact of cold water releases on native fish and develop risk assessments and mitigation strategies to ensure that cold water releases do not impact on native fish.

Recommendation 30

4.279 The committee recommends that the MDBA work with basin state governments to investigate the efficiency and effectiveness of salt interception schemes and combine their use and other complementary measures to manage salinity in the basin.

Recommendation 31

4.280 The committee recommends the Commonwealth fund and facilitate accelerated work on the restoration of surface flows from the south-east of South Australia into the lower Coorong, and undertake a feasibility study into the potential for redirecting all existing drainage discharges from the South East into the Coorong.