

**Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications**  
**Legislation Committee**  
Answers to questions on notice  
**Environment portfolio**

**Question No:** 230  
**Hearing:** Budget Estimates  
**Outcome:** Agency  
**Programme:** Murray-Darling Basin Authority  
**Topic:** International obligations - Murray-Darling Basin Plan  
**Hansard Page:**  
**Question Date:**  
**Question Type:** Written

**Senator Urquhart asked:**

1. The Commonwealth Water Act 2007 makes provision for the management of the water resources of the Murray-Darling Basin. One of its objects (s3(b)) is 'to give effect to the relevant international agreements.... and in particular, to provide for special measures, in accordance with these agreements, to address the threats to the Basin water resources'. What special measures does the Basin Plan provide to address threats to basin water resources and give effect to international agreements?
2. Are the measures in the Basin Plan adequate to maintain the ecological character of the Ramsar sites, in particular those characteristics which are dependent on an adequate flow regime?

**Answer:**

1. The *Basin Plan 2012* (Cth) (the Basin Plan) promotes the objects of the *Water Act 2007* (Cth) (the Water Act) including to '*...give effect to relevant international agreements through the integrated management of Basin water resources...*'. While all parts of the Basin Plan contribute to these objectives, key aspects include:
  - new sustainable diversion limits (SDL) on all surface water and groundwater resources that reflect the amount of water that can be taken from a water resource without compromising key environmental assets, key ecosystems functions and key environmental outcomes;
  - an environmental watering plan that includes a Basin-wide environmental watering strategy, the setting of annual watering priorities, and the implementation of long-term environmental watering plans for each water resource plan area; and
  - new requirements for water resource plans that cover all aspects of planning, including that plans are prepared having regard to current and future risks to water resources and that they contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the environmental watering plan.
2. The Environmental Watering Plan in the Basin Plan includes as a specific objective to '*...protect and restore a subset of all water-dependent ecosystems of the Murray-Darling Basin, including by ensuring that: declared Ramsar wetlands that depend on Basin water resources maintain their ecological character...*' (s8.05). The Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder (CEWH) is required to have regard to the objects of the Environmental Watering Plan, and to annual watering priorities determined in accordance with the Plan, in making environmental watering decisions. The CEWH must report on the achievement of these requirements. The adequacy of those arrangements will be assessed as part of the review of the implementation of the Basin Plan by the Productivity Commission under the *Productivity*

*Commission Act 1998* (Cth) which must be referred to the Productivity Commission by 31 December 2018. A number of infrastructure measures associated with the Basin Plan and the earlier The Living Murray works are also intended to help maintain the ecological character of the Ramsar sites.