

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
Legislation Committee
Answers to questions on notice
Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities portfolio
Additional Budget Estimates, February 2012

Program: Division or Agency: 4: CEWO **Question No:** 099
Topic: Commonwealth Environmental Water
Proof Hansard Page and Date Written
or Written Question:

Senator Birmingham asked:

1. What is being done with the water currently held?
2. What allocations have been made for 2011/12? Will all holdings be allocated?
3. What is the expected size of holdings by the end of 2011-12?
4. How/where has water been used to date this year?
5. What volumes have been allocated for the remainder of the year?
6. How will the NWC's report on the Framework for the assessment of river and wetland health be used in relation to the use of environmental water holdings, or for that matter by the MDBA in development of the basin plan?
7. How will the CEWH make allocation decisions prior to the completion of environmental watering plans by the states?
8. Where is carryover water stored?
9. Have any decisions been made to carryover water from 2011/12 into 2012/13?

Answer:

- 1&4. Commonwealth environmental water is being managed with the objective of protecting and restoring environmental assets in the Murray-Darling Basin. Up to 31 January 2011, there had been 880 gigalitres (GL) of Commonwealth environmental water delivered since 2008-09 with 326 GL of that water used in 2011-12. This water was delivered through arrangements with delivery partners, usually state agencies. Locations where Commonwealth environmental water has been used in 2011-2012 include: the Lower Lakes and Coorong; the Goulburn, Campaspe and Loddon rivers; the Wakool system including Wakool River, Colligen Creek and Jimaringle / Cockran Creeks; the North Redbank System in the Murrumbidgee catchment; the Macquarie Marshes; the Gwydir wetlands; and the Border Rivers. Details of environmental water use are published on the Commonwealth Environmental Water website at: www.environment.gov.au/ewater.
2. To 31 January 2012, allocations made against the entitlements in the Commonwealth environmental water holdings in 2011-12 totalled 793 GL. Some of this water will be used in the current year, and some of it will be carried over in storages for environmental watering in future years.

3. The size of Commonwealth environmental entitlement holdings by the end of 2011-12 is expected to be 1,250-1,280 GL. These entitlements would have an estimated long term average annual yield of 875GL-895 GL.
5. The word “allocations” in this question has been interpreted to mean “use”. Around 180 GL of water has been agreed for delivery between 1 February 2012 and 30 June 2012. This is in addition to the 326 GL delivered to 31 January 2012. Actions are continually assessed and some may not occur depending on the inflow conditions that develop through the remainder of 2011-12.
6. The National Water Commission’s report, “Framework for the Assessment of River and Wetland Health: findings from the trials and options for uptake” (the Framework) will be used by Commonwealth Environmental Water, as input to:
 - the assessment of the water needs of environmental assets;
 - planning the use of environmental water; and
 - monitoring of the effectiveness of environmental water delivered to environmental assets.

The Murray-Darling Basin Authority currently reports ecosystem condition through the Sustainable Rivers Audit program, which informed development of, and is entirely compatible with, the Framework. It is intended that ecosystem condition monitoring within the Basin Plan monitoring and evaluation program will also be consistent with the Framework.

7. Decisions on the use of Commonwealth environmental water are made after consultation with local and state groups including delivery partners such as Basin state governments, Catchment Management Authorities, and environmental water managers and river operators in catchments across the Basin. Community input is provided through consultation with local groups, such as environmental water advisory groups and regional irrigation and landholder groups. Advice is also received from the Environmental Water Scientific Committee.
8. Carryover water associated with an entitlement in regulated systems is typically held in storages within the relevant water source in accordance with rules set by states. For example, carryover water in the Goulburn River system is stored in Eildon Reservoir.
9. Commonwealth environmental water will be carried over from 2011-12 to 2012-13 in a number of catchments. The exact volumes to be carried over in each water source have not been decided, and will be determined by decisions made over the year about allocations and use.

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Program: Division or Agency: 4: CEWO **Question 100**
Topic: Environmental purposes of
Commonwealth Environmental Water **No:**
Proof Hansard Page and Date Written
or Written Question:

Senator Joyce asked:

1. To what additional environmental purposes is the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder going to put purchased environmental water and what specific volumes are required in each of the Border Rivers, Gwydir, Namoi and Macquarie for these purposes?

Answer:

1. The Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder must manage the Commonwealth's environmental water holdings in accordance with the environmental watering plan, to be developed as part of the Basin Plan by the Murray-Darling Basin Authority (the Authority). This plan will provide an adaptive framework to meet identified environmental objectives and annual watering priorities. The adaptive management approach will see watering decisions respond to changing circumstances, such as the evolution of weather events, changes in water availability and the condition of environmental assets. Community input into the management of all environmental water across the Basin is provided through consultation with local groups, such as environmental water advisory groups and regional irrigation and landholder groups.

As part of its work to determine the sustainable diversion limits and develop the draft Basin Plan, the Authority has identified and modelled the environmental objectives and flow indicators, as well as the proposed volumes of environmental water. This work is available on the Authority's website: <http://www.mdba.gov.au/draft-basin-plan/supporting-documents>.

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Program: Division or Agency: 4: CEWO **Question No:** 101

Topic: Environmental watering event –
Gwydir system

Proof Hansard Page and Date Written

or Written Question:

Senator Joyce asked:

1. In late 2011 a supplementary water event was announced in the Gwydir regulated system. My understanding is that the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder declined the access to their share of the event. Why was the access declined?

Answer:

1. The November-December 2011 rainfall event in the Gwydir system inundated core wetland areas and the Bureau of Meteorology was forecasting further rain. Accordingly, immediate environmental watering requirements were satisfied by the unregulated flows. This is an example of adaptive management.

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Program: Division or Agency: 4: CEWO **Question** 102
No:

Topic: Release of environmental water –
Macquarie Marshes

Proof Hansard Page and Date Written

or Written Question:

Senator Joyce asked:

1. In respect of the release of environmental water to the Macquarie Marshes last summer. Did you originally use water from a water sharing plan for this environmental watering?
2. After this watering event in the Macquarie did you ask State Water to change the accounts in respect of the released water so that the debt came from purchased buyback water not water from a water sharing plan? If so, why was this direction given?

Answer:

1. Commonwealth Environmental Water did not use water from a water sharing plan. The environmental watering undertaken in the Macquarie Marshes last summer involved a collaboration with New South Wales (NSW) Government agencies. The water utilised in the watering action was made up of a combination of sources, including planned NSW environmental water, which is under the control of NSW Office of Environment and Heritage and the NSW Office of Water. The action also utilised NSW Riverbank held environmental water and Commonwealth environmental water.
2. No.

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Program: Division or Agency: 4: CEWO **Question No:** 103

Topic: Use of Commonwealth Environmental Water in the Gwydir catchment

Proof Hansard Page and Date Written

or Written Question:

Senator Joyce asked:

1. In May 2009, the Federal government purchased 240 GL of water entitlement from Twynam for a reported \$303 million. Two and a half years later, can the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder report on how the Twynam water purchased in the Gwydir has actually been used and can you please substantiate this use with copies of water orders and diversion? What specific environmental benefit has resulted from this use?

Answer:

1. Commonwealth environmental water holdings in the Gwydir total 109 gigalitres of which 63 gigalitres was acquired from Twynam. In the last two and a half years (to 31 January 2012), 15.6 gigalitres of Commonwealth water allocations have been used for environmental watering actions. This involved the transfer of allocations to New South Wales (NSW) Office of Environment and Heritage for delivery for the purpose of meeting environmental objectives in the Gwydir Wetlands. Under this arrangement the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage places orders for water delivery.

The 2010-11 Commonwealth Environmental Water Outcomes Report provides information on the environmental benefits achieved in the Gwydir from use of Commonwealth environmental water. This report can be found on the Commonwealth Environmental Water website, www.environment.gov.au/ewater.

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Program: Division or Agency: 4: CEWO **Question No:** 104

Topic: Commonwealth Environmental Water Holders usage of recovered water

Proof Hansard Page and Date or Written Question: Written

Senator McKenzie asked:

1. How was the water that has already been recovered used by the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder this year (2011/2012).

Answer:

1. Up to 31 January 2012 there has been 326 gigalitres of Commonwealth environmental water used in 2011-12, with the objective of protecting and restoring environmental sites in the Murray-Darling Basin. Locations where Commonwealth environmental water has been used in 2011-2012 include: the Lower Lakes and Coorong; the Macquarie Marshes; the Gwydir wetlands; the Goulburn, Campaspe and Loddon rivers; the Wakool system including Jimaringle – Cockran Creeks and Colligen Creek; the North Redbank System in the Murrumbidgee catchment; and the Border Rivers. This water was delivered through arrangements with delivery partners, usually State agencies, consistent with the principles of adaptive management. Details of environmental water use are published on the Commonwealth Environmental Water website at: www.environment.gov.au/ewater.