

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

Program: Division or Agency: MDBA

Question No: 277

Topic: Purchase of easements

Proof Hansard Page and Date Written

or Written Question:

Senator Joyce asked:

1. Can you please provide an update on negotiations to purchase easements between Hume Dam and Lake Mulwala? When does the expect these negotiations to conclude?

Answer:

1. The Murray-Darling Basin Authority (the Authority) is considering acquisition of two easements between Hume Dam and Lake Mulwala. The easements are being obtained for the purposes of River Murray System operations.

For the first easement, an agreement was developed with the property owner, who has subsequently decided against taking up the offer.

In relation to the second easement, the Authority has commenced work to develop an easement proposal for consideration by the property owner.

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Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities portfolio
Supplementary Budget Estimates, October 2012

Program: Division or Agency: MDBA **Question 279**
No:

Topic: Native Fish Strategy

Proof Hansard Page and Date Written

or Written Question:

Senator Birmingham and Joyce asked:

1. Why was the Native Fish Strategy cut?
2. What programs have replaced it to combat the threats of invasive fish species?
3. Have any new plans to combat invasive fish species been presented to Basin Ministers?
4. If not, when is there likely to be new plans presented?
5. Is this likely to increase or reduce overall funding levels for management of invasive fish species?
6. Was any expert advice provided on the future of the Native Fish Strategy? If so, please provide copies.
7. Did the Government receive advice from the Threatened Species Scientific Committee stating that the EPBC Act should be amended to include in the list of key threatening processes "The introduction of native or non-native fish into Australian inland waters that are outside their natural geographic distribution"? What response has the Government given?
8. What impact does the government expect this decision will have on the number of carp in the system?

Answer:

1. The Native Fish Strategy program is jointly funded by Murray-Darling Basin governments. New South Wales (NSW) unilaterally reduced its contribution to the 2012/2013 joint program budget by approximately \$20 million. In order to limit expenditures within the reduced funding available, Basin governments made a joint decision to conclude the Native Fish Strategy program in 2012/2013.
2. The Murray–Darling Basin Authority (the Authority) is continuing its partnership with the Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre beyond 2012/2013 (that is, beyond the end of the Native Fish Strategy program) with small cash contributions and in-kind support in 2013/2014 and 2014/2015 respectively.
3. Murray-Darling Basin states are responsible for invasive fish species within their jurisdictional areas.

4. Through The Living Murray initiative, the potential recruitment of pest fish species such as European carp has been identified as a significant issue. It is likely that some investment in research and/or management plans will be needed to inform the adaptive management of environmental water. This investment could be made individually by each jurisdiction, including the Commonwealth, or through joint government investment.
5. Given Murray-Darling Basin states are responsible for invasive fish species within their jurisdictional areas, it is difficult to account or indeed predict overall funding levels for management of invasive fish species.
6. The Authority is not aware of any expert advice sought by Basin governments in relation to their decision to cease the Native Fish Strategy program.
7. Yes. The Minister decided not to include this nomination in the list of key threatening processes on 11 November 2011. Refer also:
<http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/ktp/outside-fish.html>
8. European carp numbers fluctuate in response to prevailing environmental conditions. The decision to cut the Native Fish Strategy program is unlikely to directly influence the number of European carp in the system in the short term. The joint government decision to cease the Native Fish Strategy program through the Authority does not prevent Basin states from undertaking measures to combat the threats of invasive fish species for which they are responsible.

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Program: Division or Agency: MDBA **Question No:** 280

Topic: Environmental Watering Plans

Proof Hansard Page and Date Written

or Written Question:

Senator Birmingham asked:

1. What progress is being made on developing environmental watering plans?
2. Have any state Governments expressed concerns or raised potential problems with their role or ability to produce plans on time?
3. How do you view the EWP and state based plans underneath it actually working?
4. What exactly are the guidelines states are being given in developing their plans?
5. Were there set volumes of environmental water per area that states had to work with? What happens if a state returns a plan that does not use all environmental water allocated to an area?
6. Can a state reduce its SDLs by refusing to use all environmental water allocated to a particular area?
7. Who makes actual environmental watering decisions – as in gives the final go ahead to each individual watering decision as it occurs? When is the final decision made? At the time, in the days leading up to, a month before, at the beginning of the year?
8. What ability will the decision maker have to alter plans to reflect changes in on the ground conditions?
9. Could it be possible if rigidity in rules is tight, that environmental watering plans could exacerbate flood events if there is insufficient ability to amend plans at short notice?

Answer:

1. The requirement for state long-term environmental watering plans to be developed under the Murray-Darling Basin Plan (Basin Plan) is within 12 months of the Basin-wide Environmental Watering Strategy being published, or within another time-frame agreed to by the Murray-Darling Basin Authority (the Authority) and a Basin State.
2. The Basin Plan provides flexibility to negotiate delivery of these plans with the states. This provides an opportunity to mitigate any concerns expressed about deadlines or resourcing. There are ongoing discussions with the states to clarify and assist with interpretation of the requirements outlined in the Basin Plan.

3. The planning arrangements under the environmental management framework in the Environmental Watering Plan are designed to facilitate consultation, coordination and co-operative arrangements among the Authority, the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder and Basin states.
4. Chapter 8 of the Basin Plan and the statutory 'Guidelines for the method to determine priorities for applying environmental water' (November 2012) are the key guidance that are currently available to states. Both these are available on the Authority's web site. The Authority must also prepare a Basin-wide Environmental Watering Strategy by November 2014. This strategy will also guide states' preparation of plans.
5. No. The volume available will vary each year depending on climatic conditions and the types of environmental water. A long-term environmental watering plan must be able to respond to this variability. A long term-environmental watering plan must also identify possible cooperative arrangements between an area and neighbouring water resource plan areas.
6. No.
7. Holders of held environmental water, managers of planned environmental water and river operators make environmental watering decisions. Planning to inform decisions occurs on a long-term, annual or more frequent basis. Final decisions are made by these parties after consideration of on-ground conditions.
8. The Environmental Watering Plan (Chapter 8) of the Basin Plan provides flexibility for decision makers to alter plans to reflect changes in on the ground conditions in real time.
9. No. In addition to the flexibility described in answer 8, the Environmental Watering Plan (Chapter 8) includes principles to be applied in environmental watering. These principles include assessing risk, working with local communities and adaptive management.

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Program: Division or Agency: MDBA

Question No: 281

Topic: 2,750 GL scenario

Proof Hansard Page and Date Written

or Written Question:

Senator Joyce asked:

1. Will any bridges or roads be flooded or need to be redesigned as a result of the 2750 GL scenario?
2. Does the government expect any roads to be flooded for any duration under the 2750 GL scenario?
3. Does the government expect any homes to be flooded for any duration under the 2750 GL scenario?

Answer:

1. The 2,750 gigalitre scenario represents the delivery of environmental water within present operating constraints so no upgrades will be necessary. However, evidence suggests that we may be able to get better environmental outcomes if some of the constraints are addressed, which may include things like bridge and road upgrades. If this is the case they will be assessed and funded through the Constraints Management Strategy.
2. No more than under current operating arrangements.
3. No more than under current operating arrangements.

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Program: Division or Agency: MDBA **Question No:** 282

Topic: Basin Plan - Determination of water allocation

Proof Hansard Page and Date Written

or Written Question:

Senator Xenophon asked:

I note the purpose of the Murray-Darling Basin Agreement (contained in Schedule 1 to the Water Act 2007) is “to promote and co-ordinate effective planning and management for the equitable, efficient and sustainable use of the water and other natural resources of the Murray Darling Basin”.

1. Can the Department advise how the water allocation for each Basin State (as prescribed by the Murray-Darling Basin Plan) is determined to be equitable?

Answer:

1. The approach used to develop the Sustainable Diversion Limits (SDLs) in the Murray-Darling Basin Plan (and therefore the water allocated for each Murray-Darling Basin State) has been applied in an equitable manner. For example, the Murray-Darling Basin Authority adopted a consistent approach to defining and quantifying the starting point (the baseline diversion limits) against which the effect of implementing the SDLs can be assessed. The Baseline Diversion Limits (BDLs) reflect the water sharing arrangements that were in place in June 2009. In most cases the BDL reflects the diversion limit established under the Cap on diversions, unless there is a State water resource plan that sets the limit lower than the Cap. The consistent settings and assumptions for BDLs include:
 - Using the most up to date means of quantifying the baseline (typically using a model);
 - Using the same climate period (1895-2009);
 - Accounting for certain environmental water as outside the baseline (including the Living Murray and Water for Rivers); and
 - Adjusting for permanent trade to 30 June 2009.

The approaches used to determine environmental watering requirements and analyse the socio-economic implications of reduced water use were also applied consistently across all Basin States.

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Program: Division or Agency: MDBA **Question 283**
No:

Topic: Basin Plan – cost impacts for states

Proof Hansard Page and Date Written

or Written Question:

Senator Birmingham asked:

1. In reference to QoN 260 – how is it possible that the Basin plan will result in ‘no net costs’ for States considering requirements like developing Environmental Watering Plans? Are states being paid to carry out such work? From what funding pool?

Answer:

1. In 2008, the Commonwealth and the Basin states signed an Agreement on Murray-Darling Basin Reform. As part of this Agreement, the Commonwealth made a commitment that States would not bear additional net costs as a consequence of the reforms agreed between the parties and the implementation of the *Water Act 2007* (including the Basin Plan). It was also agreed that this undertaking will cease on 30 June 2015.

The Commonwealth Government is currently engaged in discussions with Basin states on a proposed new Intergovernmental Agreement on implementing Murray-Darling Basin reforms. It is intended that this new agreement, once finalised, will include provision for Commonwealth funding associated with additional costs to be incurred by Basin States in implementing the Basin Plan. The Communiqué of the Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council of 30 November 2012 included a joint information statement on progress to date in these discussions.

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Program: Division or Agency: MDBA **Question 284**
No:

Topic: Basin Plan independent scientific
modelling – South Australian
Government statements

Proof Hansard Page and Date Written

or Written Question:

Senator Birmingham asked:

In regards to the independent scientific modelling undertaken by the MDBA and provided to Basin States that showed the Milang salinity target would be met 99 per cent of the time:

1. Is Minister Caica's statement true that under the current proposed Basin Plan "The Coorong, Lower Lakes and Murray Mouth remain at risk of ...high salinities which will have serious consequences for the aquatic animals and plants in this region"?
2. Is Minister Caica's statement true that "Under the proposal, there will still be insufficient flows to export salt out of the Basin and ensure the Murray Mouth will remain open during times of drought."?
3. Is Premier Weatherill's statement true that, in respect to salinity levels at least that if "we want a plan based on science and the science is irrefutable - 2750 gigalitres is not enough for a healthy river."?

Answer:

The Murray-Darling Basin Authority (the Authority) has published the results of river system modelling undertaken to inform the Murray-Darling Basin Plan (Basin Plan) in a number of reports available on the Authority's website. Specifically, results for the Coorong, Lower Lakes and Murray Mouth are published in the Hydrologic Modelling Report (http://download.mdba.gov.au/proposed/Hydro_Modelling_Report.pdf) in Table 100 on page 237.

The Authority believes the proposed Environmentally Sustainable Level of Take and associated environmental outcomes meet the requirements of the *Water Act 2007*, and will achieve the objective of a healthy working basin, and optimises environmental, social and economic outcomes.

With regard to specific outcomes for the Coorong, Lower Lakes and Murray Mouth (the site) the Authority is confident that the Basin Plan can achieve the desired environmental objectives. This includes significant reductions in Coorong salinities and improvements to salt export and Murray Mouth openness that are commensurate with a healthy working river. Notwithstanding this, the Authority expects that like all natural systems across the Murray-Darling Basin, the condition of the site will vary over time depending on climatic conditions. During drought, the condition of the site is likely to decline but not to the critical levels seen during the recent Millennium Drought that threatened the ecological character of the site. The substantive increases in environmental water through the Basin Plan will enable the site to recover and become more resilient to the impact of drought having benefited from additional water in the period leading into drier conditions.

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Program: Division or Agency: MDBA **Question 285**
No:

Topic: Enacting watering plans by delivery partners

Proof Hansard Page and Date Written

or Written Question:

Senator McKenzie asked:

In relation to the following:

“Delivery partners are constrained in their ability to release and distribute environmental water by their legal obligations not to cause damage to third parties. They could be held liable under the private flooding provisions of the Water Act 1989 (Vic), or under the common law of nuisance or negligence, for causing water to flow onto private property in a way that causes personal injury, property damage or economic loss” (p.3, Victorian EDO and Environment Victoria Submission in response to Performance Audit of Commonwealth Environmental Watering Activities, “Limitation – Liability for Private Flooding”)

1. Does the MDBA agree with the Victorian EDO and Environment Victoria’s assessment of potential liability in enacting environmental watering plans by delivery partners?
2. In Victoria the river operator (and thereby a delivery partner) is Goulburn Murray Water. Are there other delivery partners in Victoria, such as Catchment Management Authorities or other water authorities?
3. Goulburn Murray Water is largely funded by irrigators (~80 per cent), however, receives some monies from the Commonwealth and Victorian Government for other services it provides, which includes the delivery of environmental water. If a successful liability claim was brought against Goulburn Murray Water and the Victorian Government refused to cover that claim, would the MDBA cover this cost? Failure to do so would leave irrigators unfairly burdened.

Answer:

1. The Murray-Darling Basin Plan includes the requirement for development of a Constraints Management Strategy as a comprehensive and rigorous assessment of options related to the delivery of environmental water in consultation with the Commonwealth and Basin State governments and key stakeholders (including landholders). This would include assessment of private land issues. In relation to legal liability, this is potentially different in each State and within states depending on the circumstances.

2. The partners to delivery of Victorian environmental water would need to be checked directly with the Victorian Government or the Victorian Environmental Water Holder. The full range of delivery partners for Commonwealth environmental water will be determined by planning documents, including accredited State water resource plans. As these have not yet been prepared by the Basin states, it is not possible for the Murray-Darling Basin Authority to provide a list of all delivery partners.
3. The question is hypothetical.

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Program: Division or Agency: MDBA **Question No:** 286

Topic: Flood easements

Proof Hansard Page and Date Written

or Written Question:

Senator McKenzie asked:

1. The recently release report “Hydrologic modelling of the relaxation of operational constraints in the southern connected system: Methods and results, October 2012” refers to “obtaining flood easements” as a method for easing system constraints to deliver higher volumes of environmental water.
 - a. Has the MDBA identified the area of land that would be affected and needing flood easements under the 3200 GL relaxed constraints model?
 - b. If the answer is no to question one, could the authority give an order of magnitude estimate of the land that would be affected?
 - c. Will the latest version of the Basin Plan (version 4, 2750 GL) require the acquisition of flood easements to implement Environmental Watering Plans?
 - d. Who will pay for the associated costs in securing flood easements presuming they are needed in the final Basin Plan?
 - e. Could the authority give an order of magnitude estimate of the total cost of removing “system constraints” to achieve outcomes described by the 3200 GL relaxed constraints model? i.e. Would the cost be greater than \$1, \$2 or \$5 billion?

Answer:

- 1a. Preliminary work has been done on the Murray River although the exact area in the Murray and other valleys will be determined during the scoping and feasibility stages of the Constraints Management Strategy.
- 1b. See answer to 1a.
- 1c. As at 26 October 2012, the Australian Government has committed \$1.77 billion over 10 years from 2014 for the removal/relaxation of constraints (\$200 million) and for initiatives that recover up to 450 gigalitres of additional water for the environment with neutral socio-economic impact (\$1.57 billion). There are some additional smaller benefits from relaxing constraints with 2,750 gigalitres however, the greatest benefit of relaxing constraints is achieved with the additional 450 gigalitres of environmental water with no additional socio-economic impacts. Therefore, the 2,750 gigalitres does not require constraints to be relaxed but slightly better environmental outcomes are likely to accrue.
- 1d. The Commonwealth through the Constraints Management Strategy. See answer to 1c.
- 1e. It would not be greater than any of the figures suggested.

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Program: Division or Agency: MDBA **Question 287**
No:

Topic: Flood warning mechanisms

Proof Hansard Page and Date Written

or Written Question:

Senator McKenzie asked:

The Environmental Watering Plan objectives at specific indicator sites in the Lower Goulburn River Floodplain (flows gauged at McCoy's Bridge on the Goulburn River) would require "25,000ML/day for a median duration of five days between June and November for 70 per cent of years" and 40,000ML/day for a median duration of 4 days between June and November for 40 per cent of years to ensure floodplain and wetland communities are sustained in a healthy condition (The Proposed" environmentally sustainable level of take" for surface water of the Murray Darling Basin: Method and Outcomes-November 2011 p 211).

To achieve a maximum, manipulated environmental flow of 40,000ML/day every 2.5 years at McCoy's Bridge, requires being able to employ peak flows from the upper Goulburn tributaries at times of high rainfall events and connect these flows with environmental releases, as the maximum environmental releases from Eildon are constrained to 10,000-12,000ML/day.

It is acknowledged that due to these constraints, it is ONLY in conjunction with peak flood flows from the tributaries of the Upper Goulburn, that is the Yea, Murrindindi, Acheron, that the environmental releases of the above magnitude can be achieved

The ability to maximise the impact of environmental releases by coinciding them with peak flows from the unregulated tributaries requires the ability to accurately predict peak flows from the unregulated tributaries.

Yet, as the Alluvium Final Recommendations Determination of Environmental Flow Requirements for the Yea River Feb 2008, states: "The ability to accurately model the hydrology in a catchment the scale of the Yea River is heavily compromised due to the paucity of stream flow gauges".

Only 43 per cent of the combined UPPER catchment of the Murrindindi and Yea Rivers (the second largest tributary to the upper Goulburn) is gauged by one real time telemetry stream flow gauge.

"Flood forecasters rely heavily on real time data about rainfall and river water levels as well as rainfall forecasts" (Comrie Flood Report Dec 2010 P. 33)

It seems all the floodplain landowners along the Goulburn River and indeed in the many upper river sub-catchments will be subject to manipulated flood inundation in a vastly increased flooding regime, so I ask the following questions:

1. Does the MDBA concede that the number and locations of real time stream flow gauges in tributaries of the upper Goulburn catchment will need to be reviewed to achieve increased environmental flows at acceptable risk?
2. If it is decided more real time stream flow gauges are need, who will pay for installation and maintenance of these gauges?
3. Who will be responsible for warning the hundreds of floodplain landowners in the upper Goulburn Catchment of impending flooding caused by environmental releases so that they have time to move stock, pumps and other infrastructure? This is important in relation to the extremely short time frame available (6-12 HOURS in the upper catchment).
4. With or without real-time telemetry gauges, how will the unpredictability of rainfall be overcome, particularly in headwaters of the upper catchment where annual rainfall in the headwaters of the forested Murrindindi catchment is 2,000mls/p.a. and in the headwaters of the Yea River it is 1600mls/p.a.?
5. Currently in the upper Goulburn Catchment flood warning systems are based on urban flood overlays, not on farming floodplain enterprises. Will a flood warning service be put in place to alert floodplain landowners of impending flooding from environmental releases?
6. Will the MDBA either fund fully or partially any revised flood warning system?

Answer:

1. The Murray-Darling Basin Authority (the Authority) through the Victorian Water Monitoring Partnership (the Partnership) periodically reviews all available information and data collected to support water management in Victoria including for flood management. The Partnership involves all agencies involved in water management including Bureau of Meteorology (the Bureau), Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (the department), Goulburn-Murray Water, Catchment Management Authorities and the Authority.
2. Costs of hydrometric data collection in Victoria are shared between the partners depending on which partners utilise the data from any given site.
3. Formal flood warnings are issued by the Bureau taking account of estimates of releases provided by dam operators (in this case Goulburn-Murray Water). On the upper Murray, the Authority and State Water are also working together to enhance advice on overbank flows (but less than minor flood) to downstream floodplain occupants.
4. Australian water managers have significant experience in managing water in a landscape with highly variable rainfall.
5. See response to question 3.
6. See response to question 2.

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**Question 288
No:**

Topic: MDBA public meetings

Proof Hansard Page and Date Written

or Written Question:

Senator McKenzie asked:

1. How many MDBA support staff attended the latest round of MDBA public meetings held in Victoria?
2. Can you the give a cost of running these meetings?

Answer:

1. Throughout the consultation on the draft Murray-Darling Basin Plan, the Murray-Darling Basin Authority (the Authority) conducted a variety of different style meetings with the public in Victoria. These included round table, open house meetings, 'town hall' style meetings, briefings with the banking sector, water trade and specific Indigenous consultation meetings. There were a total of 40 meetings held in Victoria during the formal consultation period.

The Authority members and 38 Authority staff were involved in these meetings and many individual staff attended numerous meetings.

2. The cost of the meetings held in Victoria during the 20 week formal consultation period (including venue hire, catering, audio visual, security and facilitators) was \$29,758.82.

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Program: Division or Agency: MDBA **Question No:** 289

Topic: Murray-Darling Basin Plan - budget

Proof Hansard Page and Date Written

or Written Question:

Senator Birmingham asked:

1. Would it be correct that over \$100 million has been spent on the Basin Plan to date? What is the current total?
2. How much has NSW reduced its contribution to the MDBA by? Have other states or the Commonwealth altered their contribution? If so, who and by how much?
3. What activities will be cut as a result of reduced funding to the MDBA?

Answer:

1. Since commencement of operations in September 2008, through to 30 September 2012, the Murray-Darling Basin Authority has spent \$105.334 million on Murray-Darling Basin planning activities.
2. The New South Wales contribution to the Authority for 2012/13 has been reduced by \$19.798 million. The other states and the Commonwealth have not altered their contribution.
3. Funding reductions were applied to the following activities:
 - The South Eastern Australian Climate Change Initiative.
 - The Living Murray Indigenous Partnerships Program.
 - Geospatial Services.
 - Independent Audit Coordination.
 - A range of River Management operations.
 - Environmental Delivery – New South Wales Icon Site Management.
 - Native Fish Strategy.
 - Sustainable Rivers Audit.
 - Emergency Measures.
 - Corporate overheads.

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Program: Division or Agency: MDBA **Question No:** 290

Topic: New water modelling

Proof Hansard Page and Date Written

or Written Question:

Senator Xenophon asked:

I refer to last week's release of new water modelling for the 3200 GL figure. It shows that returning 3200 GL to the environment and removing constraints would meet 94 per cent of 18 key floodplain and river channel environmental flow targets. This compares to the current approach, which would only see 61 per cent of targets being met.

1. Given the Water Act requires the plan to act on the best available science, surely given the release of the 3200GL modelling – which shows a distract improvement in environmental outcomes for SA – surely the Minister cannot proceed with the 2750GL/year figure?

Answer:

1. The Murray-Darling Basin Authority (the Authority) modelling indicates that 11 out of 18 (61 per cent) environmental flow indicators along the River Murray can be achieved with 2,800 gigalitres of water recovery and current constraints in place, whereas 17 out of 18 (94 per cent) environmental flow targets could be achieved by combining a further 400 gigalitres of water recovery (3,200 GL in total) with the relaxation of key flow delivery constraints, primarily limits on channel height in order to prevent flooding. The modelling also showed that further water recovery without relaxing constraints, or relaxing constraints without further water recovery, would deliver marginal environmental benefits.

The relaxation of all identified constraints is outside the Authority's mandate as changes to river operating roles are managed under State arrangements and pertain to private land. The Authority determined that a water recovery target of 2,750 gigalitres is the right starting point for the return of environmental water in the Murray-Darling Basin given the time needed to determine if the constraints can be adequately addressed and the potential for additional social and economic impact to local communities from an extra 450 gigalitres water recovery, which would depend on the means of recovery.

On 9 July 2012, the Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council requested under Section 43A(4) of the *Water Act 2007* that the Murray-Darling Basin Plan (Basin Plan) requires the development of a Constraints Management Strategy, and the Authority has included this requirement in the Basin Plan. This strategy will assess the feasibility, costs and impacts associated with the removal of key constraints. The plan includes a Sustainable Diversion Limit (SDL) adjustment mechanism that will enable the recovery of up to an additional 450 gigalitres of water through efficiency measures with neutral or improved socio-economic impact. Together these actions will allow the necessary work to progress and for the SDL to be adjusted to improve environmental outcomes as explored through the recent modelling.

The Commonwealth has committed to delivering the additional 450GL announced by the Prime Minister on 26 October 2012 and has introduced legislation on this issue.

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Question No: 291

Topic: Operation of barrages

Proof Hansard Page and Date Written

or Written Question:

Senator Birmingham asked:

1. How much water is estimated to leak through or under the barrages each year?
2. What flaws in the operation of the barrages have been identified? How much water is lost via sub-optimal operation?
3. What would be required to upgrade the barrages?

Answer:

1. No measurements have been made of volumes of water leaking through or under the barrages each year as leakage is not material and does not impact on the effective operations of the barrages.

During extreme drought of 2006-2010 there was an extensive program to seal the various gates and stoplogs to prevent sea water leaking into the upstream lakes and channels.

2. Around the year 2000 a number of possible improvements to barrage operations were identified which were aimed at enabling more rapid and frequent opening and closing of some bays at Mundoo, Ewe Island and Tauwitche Barrages. These modifications together with the construction of five fishways have been completed.

Further investments are being considered to enhance barrage operations including:

- a. up to eight more fishways;
- b. remote operation of the six existing vertical axis spindle gates at Mundoo; and
- c. provision of up to two vertical axis spindle gates at Boundary Creek.

No water is lost due to "sub-optimal" operation as operations remain effective.

3. To implement the further minor improvements mentioned above would cost in the order of \$5 million.

Based on lessons learned over 70 years of barrage operations and specific lessons learned from modifications made in the past decade, the Murray-Darling Basin Authority estimates that to provide automatic operation of every bay at every barrage would cost in excess of \$100 million and considers that such investment would provide little, if any, improvement in operational effectiveness.

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Program: Division or Agency: MDBA

Question No: 292

Topic: MDBA - Potential fraud investigation

Proof Hansard Page and Date Written

or Written Question:

Senator Birmingham and Joyce asked:

1. Has the potential fraud investigation referred to in QoN 222 been resolved? Was the potential fraud by a water user or staff member? What was the outcome?

Answer:

1. The matter is still under investigation and it is therefore not appropriate to provide further details at this stage.

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Program: Division or Agency: MDBA **Question No:** 293

Topic: Reviews

Proof Hansard Page and Date Written

or Written Question:

Senator Birmingham asked:

1. What impact does the decision not to proceed with the 2015 review have on the environmental review planned for 2017 or water markets and water management review planned for 2016?
2. What other reviews will be occurring before the Basin Plan is next reviewed in totality? When will such a comprehensive review take place?

Answer:

1. The decision not to proceed with the 2015 review of the long-term average Sustainable Diversion Limits (SDL) has no impact on other review processes under the proposed Murray-Darling Basin Plan.
2. The *Water Act 2007* (section 50) requires that the Murray-Darling Basin Authority (the Authority) review the Basin Plan within the tenth year of the Basin Plan being made, unless the Authority has already undertaken such a review in accordance with a request of the Minister or at the request of the all of the Basin states, as provided for at section 50 (2).

The *Water Act 2007* (section 22, item 13) also requires reviews of the water quality and salinity targets in the water quality and salinity management plan, and of the environmental watering plan be conducted every five years.

In addition, the altered proposed Basin Plan provides for the Authority, in consultation with Basin states and other interested parties, to conduct research and investigations into the long-term average SDLs or any other aspects of the Basin Plan, for the purpose of informing any reviews of the Basin Plan or aspects of the Basin Plan, including in relation to whether there should be changes to the long-term average SDLs.

In response to suggestions received from the Minister on the altered proposed Basin Plan under section 44 (1) of the *Water Act 2007*, the Authority is considering undertaking such research and investigations by 2015 into aspects of the Basin Plan in the northern Basin, including the basis for surface water and groundwater SDLs.

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

Program: Division or Agency: MDBA **Question No:** 294

Topic: Murray-Darling Basin - Senate Inquiry

Proof Hansard Page and Date Written

or Written Question:

Senator Xenophon asked:

I refer to the recently released second interim report for the Senate inquiry into the management of the Murray Darling Basin. Among other things, the report said that the MDBA had “repeatedly ignored the major flaws in the Basin Plan, identified by virtually all relevant stakeholders including farmers, rural communities, scientists, environmentalists...”

1. Can the Authority comment on what is clearly a very damning assessment on the way it has gone about implementing this plan so far?

Answer:

1. This question relates to the opinion of the Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Australia and Transport.

The Senate Committee’s second interim report identifies what some stakeholders have interpreted as flaws in the Murray-Darling Basin Plan. We have assessed the issues raised in the report, and consider that many of the ‘flaws’ raised by stakeholders are statements that pursue a particular interest and are not based on an objective assessment of the facts.

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

Program: Division or Agency: 4: MDBA **Question No:** 295

Topic: Studies on the viability of irrigation supply companies or water authorities

Proof Hansard Page and Date or Written Question: Written

Senator McKenzie asked:

1. Have there been any studies which have studied the viability of irrigation supply companies or water authorities? If no why not? If yes, please provide detailed information about these studies.

Answer:

1. The Irrigation Modernisation Planning Assistance program provides funding to irrigation water providers to assess delivery system efficiency and scale of water losses, and to develop modernisation plans for the upgrade of irrigation infrastructure in their districts. As well as highlighting the potential for improved irrigation efficiencies, the plans have been used by irrigators both as their long term strategic plan and as a basis to seek funding for infrastructure improvements, such as through the *Water for the Future* infrastructure programs.

Grants of over \$6 million have been approved for 24 irrigation water providers in five states since the program commenced in 2007. Of these, 20 projects are complete while proponents for three projects withdrew from the program after funding had been approved. Over 80 per cent of the irrigation entitlements in the Murray Darling Basin, by volume, have been the subject of a comprehensive modernisation plan.

The Australian Government is also working with irrigation water providers on opportunities for strategic water purchasing. The government has provided \$200 million over four years for a new program to provide water savings through the reconfiguration of inefficient off-farm delivery infrastructure, with associated water purchases from irrigators on delivery channels to be decommissioned. Proposals will be developed at a local community level and will involve infrastructure operators and their irrigation customers.

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

Program: Division or Agency: MDBA

Question 296

No:

Topic: Water regulated flows

Proof Hansard Page and Date Written

or Written Question:

Senator Birmingham asked:

1. In reference to QoN 217: How accurate is metering? Are there areas where metering is better/worse? What is the point of info if it isn't based on best data?

Answer:

1. The most accurate meters are considered to have an accuracy of +/- 5 per cent while other meters, for example measurement of bulk flows in-stream, are less accurate.

The accuracy of metering varies across different areas of the Murray-Darling Basin. Installation of latest and most accurate metering is expensive and needs to be considered relative to the management requirements of the particular resource. While metering is a legitimate area for cost-recovery, in some instances the Australian Government has provided assistance to more rapidly roll out more effective metering.

Currently, the best available data is being used for water accounting purposes. The draft Murray-Darling Basin Plan contains provisions which require the best available data to be used when determining the quantity of water actually taken in a water accounting period.

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

Program: Division or Agency: MDBA **Question No:** 297

Topic: MDBA – Culgoa floodplain

Proof Hansard Page and Date 40

or Written Question: (16/10/12)

Senator Joyce asked:

Senator JOYCE: Can you just enlarge on what you mean by 'taking into account'? Does that mean you have done a study on it and you now know how much needs and there is some paperwork on it we could see?

Mr Parker: That particular question should be directed to the authority. I am happy to take it on notice; I am sure they would be delighted to provide all the information.

Senator JOYCE: Okay. Can you take this on notice: what is the process for the assessment of how much water is required by the Culgoa floodplain, how much does it already get and how are you going to manage it in the future.

Mr Parker: Certainly.

Answer:

The Murray-Darling Basin Authority (the Authority) assessed the environmental water requirements of the Lower Balonne floodplain, including the Culgoa floodplain, as part of its work supporting the determination of the environmentally sustainable level of take. The Authority has published this work on its website at: <http://download.mdba.gov.au/proposed/EWR-Lower-Balonne-Floodplain.pdf>. This document describes the process, the flows required to support the environmental values of the system, and flows currently received.

The Authority is committed to review this work as part of the proposed northern basin review, to be undertaken in consultation with the Authority's Northern Basin Advisory Committee.

**Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
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Answers to questions on notice
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Program: Division or Agency: MDBA **Question No:** 298

Topic: MDBA - establish economic or social outcomes

Proof Hansard Page and Date Written

or Written Question:

Senator Joyce asked:

1. How will the MDBA establish that economic or social outcomes will not be worsened by an increase in the amount of water recovered under the adjustment mechanism? Will it commission modelling? Who will do that modelling?

Answer:

1. The means of assessing the social and economic outcomes associated with proposals to be considered as part of the Sustainable Diversion Limit adjustment mechanism, including the role of modelling, is being considered in finalising the Murray-Darling Basin Plan.

The Minister's suggestions to the Murray-Darling Basin Authority of 1 November 2012 indicated that the Basin Plan should include criteria for making such assessments, which should be evidenced by the participation of farmers in programs providing investment in water efficiency and recovery projects on their farms, or in the case of alternative arrangements proposed by a State, assessment by that State that the project(s) will achieve neutral or improved socio-economic outcomes.

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

Program: Division or Agency: MDBA **Question No:** 299

Topic: Water Act Amendment Bill - Long-term Average Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment

Proof Hansard Page and Date Written

or Written Question:

Senator Joyce asked:

In an email from Tony Bigwood of the Department sent on 10 September he states that:

1. This enables the Authority to make a determinative adjustment to the SDL, making the adjustments significantly less vulnerable to legal challenge.
2. How do the amendments in this Bill make the adjustments “significantly less vulnerable to legal challenge”?
3. Can any “up” water under the adjustment mechanism come from water buybacks? What legal protections exist to prevent further buybacks occurring?
4. Where in the amendment Bill does it state that any extra water for the environment should come from irrigation efficiency upgrades?
5. How will the MDBA determine the viability of more irrigation efficiency upgrades when it has never been in charge of assessing these types of projects before?
6. Section 23A(2)(c) of the Water Amendment bill requires the MDBA to “seek and consider” advice from the Basin Officials Committee. What does “seeking and considering” advice from the Basin Officials Committee involve? Can the MDBA act against that advice?
7. What other consultation will the MDBA seek? Will it seek submissions from the community?
8. What if a State disagrees with an adjustment? How will the MDBA take that into account?
9. The Bill states that the MDBA can suggest adjustments to the SDL in a range of 5%. Taking the current SDL and the resulting water recovery of 2750 GL, what will this range be in GL per year terms under the existing Basin Plan?

Answer:

1. See the answer to question 2 below.
2. The *Water Amendment (Long-term average Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment) Bill 2012* (the Amendment Bill) provides increased certainty principally as the *Water Act 2007* did not foresee the need to make adjustments to Sustainable Diversion Limits (SDL) outside of a formal amendment to the Murray-Darling Basin Plan. Consequently, the SDL adjustment mechanism included in the Proposed Basin Plan released in August 2012 was constrained in the type of matters that could be considered as well as the method that could be applied.

The Amendment Bill provides greater certainty and transparency in the operation of the mechanism to adjust the SDLs, within defined limits, and without requiring the process associated with a formal amendment to the Basin Plan. Consequently, the Amendment Bill allows the benefit of agreed works and measures to be reflected in SDL's in a more expedient manner.

3. The Basin Plan includes an SDL adjustment mechanism, which will allow for new initiatives or projects to be developed that achieve better outcomes either for the environment or for Basin communities.

The Australian Government has committed \$1.77 billion which includes funding of projects that will contribute to the additional impact-neutral water. Through this investment, 450 gigalitres per year of additional impact-neutral water for the environment could be recovered through the implementation of additional projects, referred to in the Basin Plan as efficiency measures. These are expected to include improving the efficiency of on-farm irrigation. Section 86AD(4) of the Amendment Bill would limit the use of this funding such that it could only be used "if the project or purchase is related to an adjustment of a long-term average sustainable diversion limit." Consistent with the Basin Plan, any SDL adjustment that results from this investment would only be permitted if it was undertaken in a socio-economically neutral way and, subject to these requirements, may include purchasing water access rights under section 86AD(2)(b).

4. The Explanatory Memorandum which accompanied the Amendment Bill makes it clear that the mechanism must operate on a no-detriment basis. To be consistent with this outcome, projects to enable improved environmental outcomes, must maintain or improve the socio-economic circumstances of Murray-Darling Basin communities as per the Basin Plan.

Consistent with the Explanatory Memorandum, the Minister's suggestions provided to the Murray-Darling Basin Authority (the Authority) on 1 November 2012 require the Basin Plan to include criteria for determining adjustment to surface water SDL's. These include criteria to ensure that SDL adjustments resulting from efficiency measures will maintain or improve socio-economic outcomes as compared to those achieved with a recovery of 2,750 gigalitres per year for environmental purposes.

5. The Murray-Darling Basin Authority (the Authority) will not determine the viability of irrigation efficiency upgrades through the SDL adjustment process. Consistent with Section 6.12 of the Basin Plan, the SDL Adjustment mechanism will only be applied to projects that have been agreed by Commonwealth, State and Territory governments.

Funding and implementation of efficiency projects (which includes irrigation efficiency upgrades) will be managed by the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities who have considerable project management experience in the delivery of such projects.

6. The Minister's suggestions provided to the Authority on 1 November 2012 require the Authority to advise the Basin Officials Committee of any proposed SDL adjustment at least one month before providing a notice to the Minister under subsection 23B (2) of the Amendment Bill. The Basin Officials Committee also has the role of notifying the Authority of an agreed suite of projects to be considered under the adjustment mechanism which initiates the adjustment process.

Subsection 23B (3) of the Amendment Bill requires the notice to include the material on which the Authority based its decision to propose an amendment to the Basin Plan. Both the notice and the proposed amendments to the Basin Plan are provided by the Authority to the relevant Minister for review. The adoption of the amendment to the SDLs is a decision of the relevant Minister and not the Basin Officials Committee.

7. Section 23A(2)(d) of the Amendment Bill specifies that the Authority cannot propose an SDL adjustment without:
 - inviting members of the public to make submissions to the Authority on the proposed adjustment; and
 - providing a reasonable amount of time for those submissions to be made and considered by the Authority.
8. Only projects agreed by the Commonwealth and Basin states will be submitted to the Authority for application of the SDL adjustment mechanism. This will occur through an Intergovernmental process.
9. SDL adjustments cannot exceed plus or minus 5 per cent of the proposed surface water SDL for the Basin of an estimated 10,873 gigalitres per year, which equates to, in net terms, approximately 540 gigalitres.

**Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
Legislation Committee**
Answers to questions on notice
Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities portfolio
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Program: Division or Agency: MDBA **Question No:** 300

Topic: 3,200 GL modelling

Proof Hansard Page and Date Written

or Written Question:

Senator Joyce asked:

1. How much would it cost to remove the eight constraints that the MDBA identified its modelling of a 3200 GL outcome?
2. How many years would it take to remove these constraints?
3. Can you explain what are the constraints at Gundagai?
4. What kind of flooding would occur at the moment if 50,000 ML per day when through Gundagai?
5. How does the Water Act require you to deal with constraints in calculating the environmentally sustainable level of take?
6. How much extra land would be flooded or made in accessible between Hume and Yarrawonga by increasing flows from 25,000 ML per day to 40,000 ML per day? How much would it cost to buy easements over this land?

Answer:

1. This will be determined during the scoping and feasibility stages of a Constraints Management Strategy.
2. The time to remove or relax these constraints will be dependent on the constraint in question.
3. The constraint at Gundagai is 30,000 megalitres per day which is the minor flood level which, when exceeded, private land and minor roads may be affected.
4. A flow of 50,000 megalitres per day at Gundagai would be unlikely to impact on houses; however there may be minor flooding of some minor roads, private land and the Mundarlo Bridge near Gundagai. These impacts would be dealt with through a Constraints Management Strategy which may include raising the height of the bridge (New South Wales are currently evaluating the feasibility and cost of this).
5. The *Water Act 2007* is silent on constraints when determining an Environmentally Sustainable Level of Take.

6. Based on recent flood inundation modelling increasing flows from 25,000 to 40,000 megalitres per day between Hume and Yarrawonga would result in approximately 2,000 hectares of additional land (including wetlands) being inundated. Not all of this land would be private land and therefore not all of this land would require an easement. The cost to purchase such easements would be determined during the scoping and feasibility stages of a Constraints Management Strategy.

**Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
Legislation Committee**
Answers to questions on notice
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Supplementary Budget Estimates, October 2012

Program: Division or Agency: MDBA **Question No:** 301

Topic: Environmental works and measures

Proof Hansard Page and Date Written

or Written Question:

Senator Joyce asked:

1. It has been widely reported that around 650 GL may come from environmental works and measures. Where will these come from?
2. Will the 650 GL of environmental works and measures be “apportioned” between states or catchments? Or will the 650 GL come from wherever they can?
3. Will environmental works and measures come from the northern Basin as well? If so, will these projects go towards crediting water recovery targets in the northern basin?
4. Will the environmental works and measures only go towards crediting water recovery against the shared reduction target, or could they be credited against the local reduction amounts as well?

Answer:

1. Projects are likely to come from a range of sources including those currently undergoing pre-feasibility assessment by Murray-Darling Basin states. Detail of these 16 projects can be found at the following website: <http://www.environment.gov.au/water/policy-programs/srwui/e-works/index.html>.

Additional project proposals may be identified by Basin States in consultation with the public.

2. Under the Sustainable Diversion Limit (SDL) adjustment mechanism, contributions will be apportioned between states in accordance with any decision from the Basin Officials Committee regarding appropriate apportionment.
3. The SDL adjustment mechanism can operate in the Northern Basin, provided suitable projects are identified.
4. Supply measures can contribute to reducing either shared or local reduction amounts. The Basin Officials Committee will nominate the affected SDL resource units and reduction amounts when it notifies the Murray-Darling Basin Authority of the suite of works and measures to consider for an SDL adjustment.

**Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
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Program: Division or Agency: MDBA **Question No:** 302

Topic: Northern Basin Advisory Committee

Proof Hansard Page and Date Written

or Written Question:

Senator Joyce asked:

1. Why did the MDBA decide to appoint Mr John Clements to the Northern Basin Advisory Committee?
2. My understanding is that Mr Clements remains on the staff of Mr Tony Windsor. Is it appropriate that a political staffer is placed on a panel that is meant to provide non-partisan advice to the government?
3. Is Mr Clements being paid a wage or an allowance of any kind for being on this committee?

Answer:

1. The Murray-Darling Basin Authority (the Authority) selected members of the Northern Basin Advisory Committee (the Committee) on the basis of their expertise or interest in community, water use, environmental water management, Indigenous or local government matters. Mr Clements was selected because of his long history in the development and implementation of water policy in New South Wales and nationally, including his past involvement with Macquarie River Food and Fibre, Namoi Water and Namoi Councils Water Working Group.
2. Membership was determined so that the Committee could bring together a broad range of perspectives when providing advice to the Authority on issues in the northern Basin. In this context, the Authority believes that Mr Clements selection is appropriate.
3. Mr Clements and other members of the Committee are paid sitting fees to attend meetings. These are:
 - Full day (3 hours or more) - \$900.
 - More than 2 hours less than 3 hours - \$540.
 - Less than 2 hours - \$360.

**Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
Legislation Committee**
Answers to questions on notice
Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities portfolio
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Program: Division or Agency: MDBA

Question No: 303

Topic: Basin Plan - Regulatory Impact Statement

Proof Hansard Page and Date Written

or Written Question:

Senator Joyce asked:

1. Has the MDBA completed the Regulatory Impact Statement that will be included with the Plan? Does the RIS include a cost-benefit analysis on whether the Plan is worthwhile?

Answer:

1. The Murray-Darling Basin Authority (the Authority) prepared a Regulation Impact Statement (RIS) for the Murray-Darling Basin Plan (Basin Plan). The final RIS formed part of the supporting documentation for the Basin Plan when it was tabled in Parliament.

The RIS included an analysis of the benefits and costs of the Basin Plan.

The RIS was assessed by the Office of Best Practice Regulation (OBPR) as meeting the Australian Government's best practice regulation requirements. It was published on both the Authority and OBPR websites.

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
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Program: Division or Agency: MDBA

Question No: 304

Topic: Living Murray Initiative

Proof Hansard Page and Date Written

or Written Question:

Senator Joyce asked:

I refer you to your answer to question no. 171 from additional estimates in February on the Living Murray Initiative, where you state that:

Further work is required to determine how they might be used in conjunction with the additional water available to the environment under the Basin Plan, and what contribution they might make towards achieving the environmental outcomes of the Basin Plan.

1. Has the MDBA progressed this work and how might the Living Murray Initiative projects contribute towards achieving environmental outcomes?

Answer:

1. The Murray-Darling Basin Authority proposes to assess the benefits of the Living Murray works as part of the process to assess 'supply measures' under the Sustainable Diversion Limit adjustment mechanism proposed for the Murray-Darling Basin Plan (Basin Plan). This will involve detailed modelling to be completed before the adjustment mechanism is proposed to operate on 30 June 2016.

As the Living Murray works will enable inundation of some floodplain and wetland areas without the reliance on overbank flows, there is potential that the works may reduce the amount of water recovery required to achieve outcomes sought by the Basin Plan. Further analysis and modelling is required to accurately determine which outcomes can be replaced or substituted by the works, and the water savings that may result.

**Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
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Answers to questions on notice
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Program: Division or Agency: MDBA

Question No: 305

Topic: Murray-Darling Basin Plan – costs and staffing

Proof Hansard Page and Date Written

or Written Question:

Senator Joyce asked:

1. How much has the Authority spent on the Basin plan to date?
2. How many staff does the Authority have working on the Basin plan?

Answer:

1. Since commencement of operations in September 2008, through to 30 September 2012, the Murray-Darling Basin Authority (the Authority) has spent \$105.334 million on Murray-Darling Basin Planning activities.
2. The Authority had 151 Full Time Equivalentents working on the Murray-Darling Basin Plan as at 30 September 2012.

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
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Program: Division or Agency: MDBA **Question 306**
No:

Topic: Indigenous Employment Strategy

Proof Hansard Page and Date Written

or Written Question:

Senator Joyce asked:

1. How much has the MDBA spent on its Indigenous Employment Strategy? Have you employed any Indigenous people yet

Answer:

1. The Murray-Darling Basin Authority (the Authority) Indigenous Employment Strategy 2011 was developed internally.

The Authority provided funding in the amount of \$64,312 for the employment of 15 Indigenous facilitators on a casual basis during the proposed Basin Plan 20 week consultation period.

The Authority has also provided funding for the employment of Indigenous people through the Authority partner government programs and in 2011/2012 contributed \$799,310 to 'The Living Murray Indigenous Partnerships Program' (TLM). TLM employed Indigenous Facilitators at the Lower Lakes Coorong Murray-Mouth (Department for Water South Australia); Chowilla (New South Wales Office of Water); Lindsay-Wallpolla and Hattah Lakes (Mallee Catchment Management Authority, Victoria); and Barmah-Millewa (Department Sustainability and Environment, Victoria). In addition, funding was available for an Indigenous Facilitator at Chowilla (South Australia); however, this position has not yet been filled.

Lake Victoria operations support five Indigenous identified, full-time positions. These positions are based on an APS 6 salary and are generally non-ongoing. An additional 15 casual Indigenous positions are made available for cultural heritage monitoring throughout the year. Operation of the Lake also provides periodic casual employment to Elders Council members with up to 20 members involved in up to five meetings per year.

The Environmental Works and Measures Program employs Indigenous people in pre-construction and construction activities. At Hattah Lakes one full-time position is supported and additional casual monitors are employed as required. The Koondrook-Perricoota Forest Flood Enhancement Project has employed up to 55 Indigenous people in casual positions. Sitting fees are also provided for cultural heritage advisory groups representing the Traditional Owners and Local Aboriginal Land Councils.

The Authority also currently supports approximately five full-time positions at Menindee Lakes to manage operations, maintenance and cultural heritage management functions. Between 2002 and 2012, the Authority supported employment of six casual positions to conduct cultural heritage survey work at the Murray Mouth.

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Program: Division or Agency: MDBA

Question No: 307

Topic: MDBA - staffing

Proof Hansard Page and Date Written

or Written Question:

Senator Joyce asked:

1. How many people do you employ outside of Canberra and what are the locations of their employment?

Answer:

1. As at 30 September 2012, the Murray-Darling Basin Authority has eight employees employed outside of Canberra.

The locations are Adelaide, Albury, Sydney, Toowoomba and Hobart.

**Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
Legislation Committee**
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Program: Division or Agency: MDBA

Question No: 308

Topic: MDBA Annual Report 2011-12

Proof Hansard Page and Date Written

or Written Question:

Senator Joyce asked:

1. In your 2010-11 annual report you refer to one “potential fraud” being under investigation. Can you provide details on what this investigation covers and has the investigation concluded? What has been the outcome of the investigations?

Answer:

1. The matter is still under investigation and it is therefore not appropriate to provide further details at this stage.

**Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
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Answers to questions on notice
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Program: Division or Agency: MDBA

Question No: 309

Topic: MDBA – ministerial briefings

Proof Hansard Page and Date Written

or Written Question:

Senator Joyce asked:

1. Could you please provide the Committee with a list of the briefings the MDBA has given to the Minister for Water or his staff, and the Prime Minister, or her staff, since 20 May 2012?

Answer:

1. The Murray-Darling Basin Authority (the Authority) has provided a total of two written briefs to the office of the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities since 20 May 2012. Details are as follows:
 - Murray-Darling Basin Authority Members' Updated Conflict Of Interest Declaration.
 - Public Release of Outcomes from the South East Australia Climate Initiative.

There have also been a number of formal communications between the Authority and the Minister relating to the preparation of the Basin Plan, in accordance with sections 43 and 44 of the *Water Act 2007*. Relevant communications are publicly available on the Authority's website.

The Minister is responsible for briefing other ministers including the Prime Minister on Murray-Darling Basin issues.

**Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
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Program: Division or Agency: MDBA

Question No: 310

Topic: MDBA – record keeping

Proof Hansard Page and Date Written

or Written Question:

Senator Joyce asked:

Could the Authority please provide this Committee with all the decisions it has made since 20 May 2012 in accordance with Section 198 of the Water Act which requires the Authority to keep records of all of its decisions?

Answer:

The Murray-Darling Basin Authority (the Authority) has confirmed two Out-of-Session decisions since 20 May 2012.

The Authority adopted the following resolution effective 30 July 2012:

- Approved the draft MDBA Corporate Plan 2012/13 to 2015/16.

The Authority adopted the following resolution effective 29 October 2012:

- Agreed to appoint Professor Tom Kompas to the Advisory Committee on Social, Economic and Environmental Sciences.

**Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
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Program: Division or Agency: MDBA

Question No: 311

Topic: MDBA – minutes of meetings

Proof Hansard Page and Date Written

or Written Question:

Senator Joyce asked:

Could you please provide the minutes to any of the meetings the Authority has held since 20 May 2012?

Answer:

The Murray-Darling Basin Authority held the following meetings since 20 May 2012:

MDBA48 – 24 May 2012 – minutes are at Attachment A

MDBA49 – 5 June 2012 – minutes are at Attachment B

MDBA50 – 13 June 2012 – minutes are at Attachment C

MDBA51 – 28 June 2012 – minutes are at Attachment D

MDBA52 – 10 July 2012 – minutes are at Attachment E

MDBA53 – 30 July 2012 – minutes are at Attachment F

MDBA54 – 3 August 2012 – minutes are at Attachment G

MDBA55 – 22 August 2012 – minutes are at Attachment H

MDBA56 – 29 August 2012 – minutes are at Attachment I

MDBA57 – 4 September 2012 – minutes are at Attachment J

ATTACHMENT A – AUTHORITY MEETING 48 – 24 MAY 2012 - TELECONFERENCE

Agenda Item 1: Opening of meeting, disclosure of interests and apologies

1. The Chair **opened** the meeting at 8.40am.

Conflict of Interest

2. No member declared any conflict of interest, actual or apparent, in relation to any items on the agenda.

Agenda Item 2: Adoption of draft agenda

3. The Murray–Darling Basin Authority **adopted** the agenda for meeting 48.

Agenda Item 3: Basin Plan

Agenda Item 3.1: Approval of the proposed Basin Plan

4. The Murray-Darling Basin Authority **adopted** the following resolutions:
 - (a) **approved** the revised version of the proposed Basin Plan as the 'Proposed Basin Plan – A revised draft' prepared pursuant to section 43(10)(b) of the Act;
 - (b) **approved** the Proposed Basin Plan consultation report prepared pursuant to section 43(11) of the Act; for publication on the Murray-Darling Basin Authority's website prior to compliance with section 43A of the Act;
 - (c) **approved** The Socio-economic implications of the proposed Basin Plan - the advice on the likely socio-economic implications of any reductions in the long-term average SDLs prepared pursuant to section 43A(3) of the Act;
 - (d) **approved** the Guideline to the proposed Basin Plan - Chapter 7, at Attachment F accompanying the 'Proposed Basin Plan – A revised draft' as a statutory requirement;
 - (e) **approved** sending copies of the:
 - (i) Proposed Basin Plan – a revised draft;
 - (ii) The Socio-economic implications of the proposed Basin Plan - the advice on the likely socio-economic implications of any reductions in the long-term average SDLs;
 - (iii) Proposed Basin Plan consultation report; and
 - (iv) Guideline to the proposed Basin Plan - Chapter 7to members of the Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council on the 28 May 2012, pursuant to section 43A(2) and (3) of the Act, along with a letter; and
 - (g) **approved** the publication on the 28 May 2012 of the following documents on the Murray-Darling Basin Authority website:
 - (i) Proposed Basin Plan – A revised draft;
 - (ii) The Socio-economic implications of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan - the advice on the likely socio-economic implications of any reductions in the long-term average SDLs;
 - (iii) Proposed Basin Plan consultation report; and
 - (iv) Guideline to the proposed Basin Plan - Chapter 7.

Agenda Item 4: Other Business

5. No other business was discussed.

Agenda Item 5: Next Meeting

6. The Murray-Darling Basin Authority **confirmed** that the next Authority meeting will be held on Tuesday 5 June, 9.00am – 4.00pm in Canberra.

Meeting Close

7. The Chair **closed** the meeting at 9.45am.

ATTACHMENT B – AUTHORITY MEETING 49 – 5 JUNE 2012 - CANBERRA

Agenda Item 1: Opening of meeting, disclosure of interests and apologies

The Chair **opened** the meeting at 10.45am.

1. The Murray–Darling Basin Authority **noted** apologies from Ms Diana Gibbs, who was absent on leave.

Conflict of Interest

2. No member declared any conflict of interest, actual or apparent, in relation to any items on the agenda.

Agenda Item 2: Adoption of draft agenda

3. The Murray–Darling Basin Authority **adopted** the agenda for meeting 49.

Agenda Item 3: Confirmation of minutes of meeting 44, 45, 46, 47 and 48

4. The Murray-Darling Basin Authority
 - (a) **noted** that members agreed on 10 May 2012 to confirm the minutes from meeting 43 – 11 April 2012, and
 - (b) **noted** that the minutes from meetings 44 – 1 May 2012, 45 – 10 & 11 May 2012, 46 – 15 May 2012, 47 – 18 May 2012, and 48 – 24 May 2012 had not been cleared for circulation prior to this meeting.

Agenda Item 4: Chair's report

5. The Chair, on behalf of all Authority members, **conveyed** appreciation to MDBA staff for the professionalism and dedication exhibited during the development of the proposed Basin Plan documents and successful transmission to the governments of the Basin.
6. The Murray–Darling Basin Authority:
 1. **noted** the oral report from the Chair.

Agenda Item 5: Chief Executive's report

7. Members **noted** the upcoming commencement of the government inquiries, chaired by Tony Windsor MP, to investigate progress on strategic water buyback, environmental works and measures, and groundwater.
8. Members **noted** that the current governance arrangements for the Murray-Darling Freshwater Research Centre have been extended for three months.
9. The Murray–Darling Basin Authority **noted** the Chief Executive's report.

Agenda item 10: Communications update

10. This agenda item was not discussed.

Agenda Item 12: Basin Community Committee

Agenda Item 12.1: Basin Community Committee second term membership

11. Mr Frank Nicholas, Executive Director Corporate Services, **stepped** members through this paper.

12. The Murray–Darling Basin Authority **agreed** to extend the current membership of the BCC until the end of December 2012 to allow for continuity of the BCC during the current phase of the Basin Plan and allow the appointment of the second term BCC to align with the start of the implementation phase of the Basin Plan.

Agenda Item 12.2: Update from the Basin Community Committee 25 – 28 May 2012

13. Murray-Darling Basin Authority **noted** the update from Basin Community Committee Meeting 25 – 28 May 2012.

Agenda Item 13: Other Business

14. There were no other agenda items.

Agenda Item 14: Next Meeting

15. The Murray–Darling Basin Authority **confirmed** the date and location of meeting 50 as 10 July 2012 in Canberra.

Meeting Close

16. The Chair **closed** the meeting at 4.15pm.

ATTACHMENT C – AUTHORITY MEETING 50 – 13 JUNE 2012 – TELECONFERENCE

Agenda Item 1: Opening of meeting, disclosure of interests and apologies

The Chair **opened** the meeting at 2.35pm.

1. An apology was received from Ms Diana Gibbs and Di Davidson absent on leave.

Conflict of Interest

2. No member declared any conflict of interest, actual or apparent, in relation to any items on the agenda.

Agenda Item 2: Adoption of draft agenda

3. The Murray–Darling Basin Authority **adopted** the agenda for meeting 50.

Agenda Item 3: NSW funding cuts

4. Members **discussed** the implications of reduced contributions from NSW.

Meeting Close

5. The Chair closed the meeting at 4.10pm.

ATTACHMENT D – AUTHORITY MEETING 51 – 28 JUNE 2012 – TELECONFERENCE

Agenda Item 1: Opening of meeting, disclosure of interests and apologies

1. The Chair **opened** the meeting at 5.10pm.

Conflict of Interest

2. No member declared any conflict of interest, actual or apparent, in relation to any items on the agenda.

Agenda Item 2: Adoption of draft agenda

3. The Murray–Darling Basin Authority **adopted** the agenda for meeting 51.

Agenda Item 3: Modelling work priorities

4. Members **discussed** the feasibility and priorities around MDBA’s hydrological modelling work program.
5. The Murray-Darling Basin Authority **agreed** to continue with a series of modelling runs including:
 - (a) the development of the ‘benchmark’ model as the reference model run for a potential SDL adjustment mechanism;
 - (b) a 2750GL and a 3200GL model run to test the relaxation of some major constraints, to enable comparison of environmental outcomes with previous modelling (with constraints) and to inform the work program for 2012 – 2019; and
 - (c) two ‘bookend’ modelling runs.

Meeting Close

6. The Chair closed the meeting at 6.05pm.

ATTACHMENT E – AUTHORITY MEETING 52 – 10 JULY 2012 – CANBERRA

Agenda Item 1: Opening of meeting, disclosure of interests and apologies

1. The Chair **opened** the meeting at 11.30 am. There were no apologies.

Conflict of Interest

2. No member declared any conflict of interest, actual or apparent, in relation to any items on the agenda.

Agenda Item 2: Adoption of draft agenda

3. The Murray–Darling Basin Authority **adopted** the agenda for meeting 52.

Agenda Item 3: Confirmation of minutes of meeting 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49 and 50

4. The Murray-Darling Basin Authority **confirmed** the minutes from meetings:
 - (a) 44 – 1 May 2012;
 - (b) 45 – 10 and 11 May 2012;
 - (c) 46 – 15 May 2012;
 - (d) 47 – 18 May 2012;
 - (e) 48 – 24 May 2012;
 - (f) 49 – 5 June 2012; and
 - (g) 50 – 13 June 2012.

Agenda Item 4: Chair's report

5. The Chair **advised** he would forego his report to expedite consideration of the meeting agenda.

Agenda Item 5: Chief Executive's report

6. The MDBA Chief Executive, Dr Rhondda Dickson, **updated** members on the recent Legislative and Governance Forum meeting (29 June 2012), the Corporate Plan 2012-13 process with scheduling of additional Basin Officials Committee (BOC) meetings, and on the process of continuing state engagement on the Regulation Impact Statement.
7. The Murray–Darling Basin Authority:
 - (a) **noted** the Chief Executive's report;
 - (b) **agreed** that the logistics of using telepresence or videoconferencing facilities for Authority meetings are not workable at present; and
 - (c) **requested** that the Secretariat explores the option of convening Authority meetings via Skype.

Agenda Item 6: Basin Plan update

Agenda Item 6.1: Proposed Basin Plan – feedback from Ministerial Council

- (a) **noted** and began consideration of the matters the Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council provided to the Authority on 9 July 2012, pursuant to 43A(6)a

Agenda Item 7: Engagement Update

- 8. Members **discussed** consultation arrangements and **asked** that staff begin arranging targeted discussions with people to consult on the matters raised in the report.
- 9. The Murray-Darling Basin Authority:
 - (a) **noted** the update on engagement activities held during June and early July 2012; and
 - (b) **considered** consultation options in relation to the s43A(4) notice provided by the Ministerial Council, as the Authority considers necessary or appropriate, pursuant to 43A(6)b.

Agenda Item 8: Communications update

- 10. The Murray-Darling Basin Authority **noted** the report on media and communication activities.

Agenda Item 9: MDBA Advisory committees

Agenda Item 9.2: Update from BCC meeting 26

- 11. The Murray-Darling Basin Authority **noted** the update from Basin Community Committee Meeting 26 – 26 and 27 June 2012.

Agenda Item 9.3: Advisory committee on Social, Economic and Environmental Sciences

- 12. Membership and size of the Advisory Committee on Social, Economic and Environmental Sciences (ACSEES) was **discussed**.
- 13. The Murray-Darling Basin Authority:
 - (a) **noted** the progress on establishment of the ACSEES; and
 - (b) **requested** a short list of potential committee members to the next Authority meeting taking on board today's comments.

Agenda Item 9.4: Northern Basin Advisory Committee

- 14. The Murray-Darling Basin Authority:
 - (a) **approved** the proposed chair of the Northern Basin Advisory Committee;
 - (b) **approved** the Instrument of Establishment and Appointment outlining terms and conditions for committee members and the Chief Executive as signatory; and
 - (c) **considered** the next steps for the establishment of the Northern Basin Advisory Committee.

15. Members **noted** consideration of other advisory committees as mentioned in communication products associated with the draft proposed Basin Plan.

Agenda Item 10: Independent legal advice on the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (Cth)*

16. This agenda item was carried forward to the next meeting, MDBA53.

Agenda Item 11: Other Business

17. There were no other items of business.

Agenda Item 12: Next Meeting

18. The Murray-Darling Basin Authority **confirmed** the date and location of meeting 53 as 7 August 2012 in Canberra noting that additional meetings might be necessary at short notice to progress issues in relation to the proposed Basin Plan.

Meeting Close

19. The Chair **closed** the meeting at 4.30pm.

ATTACHMENT F – AUTHORITY MEETING 53 – 30 JULY 2012 – CANBERRA

Agenda Item 1: Opening of meeting, disclosure of interests and apologies

1. The Chair **opened** the meeting at 10.50 am.

Conflict of Interest

2. No member declared any conflict of interest, actual or apparent, in relation to any items on the agenda.

Agenda Item 2: Adoption of draft agenda

3. The Murray–Darling Basin Authority **adopted** the agenda for meeting 53.

Agenda Item 4: Chair’s report

4. The Chair **advised** he would forego his report to expedite consideration of the meeting agenda.

Agenda Item 5: Chief Executive’s report

5. The Murray-Darling Basin Authority:
 - (a) **noted** the Chief Executive’s report.

Agenda Item 6: Basin Plan

Agenda Item 6.5: Review of Murray–Darling Basin Commission Decisions

6. The Murray-Darling Basin Authority:
 - (a) **noted** the outcome of the review of former Ministerial Council and relevant Murray-Darling Basin Commission decisions under clause 151(1) of the Agreement; and
 - (b) **agreed** the review required under clause 151(2) of the Agreement is complete.

Agenda Item 7: Other Business

7. There were no other items of business.

Agenda Item 8: Next Meeting

8. The Murray-Darling Basin Authority **confirmed** meeting 54 on 3 August 2012 as a teleconference from 9.00 – 10.30am; and meeting 55 on 4 September 2012 in Canberra.

Meeting Close

The Chair **closed** the meeting at 3.45pm.

ATTACHMENT G – AUTHORITY MEETING 54 – 3 AUGUST 2012 – TELECONFERENCE

Agenda Item 1: Opening of meeting, disclosure of interests and apologies

1. The Chair **opened** the meeting at 10.00am.

Conflict of Interest

2. No member declared any conflict of interest, actual or apparent, in relation to any items on the agenda.

Agenda Item 2: Adoption of draft agenda

3. The Murray–Darling Basin Authority **adopted** the agenda for meeting 54.

Agenda Item 3: Basin Plan

Agenda Item 3.1: Approval of the altered proposed Basin Plan

4. The Chair and the Chief Executive **stepped** members through the documents for approval.
5. Members **considered** any changes that were made to the proposed Basin Plan and related documents since the last meeting.
6. Di Davidson **moved**, Barry Hart **seconded** and the other Authority members **agreed** that the following resolutions be adopted:
 - (a) **approved** the revised version of the altered Proposed Basin Plan as the 'Proposed Basin Plan' prepared pursuant to section 43A(6)(c)(ii) of the Act;
 - (b) **approved**, the 'Proposed Basin Plan - *Authority's views and consultation on the matters raised by the Murray–Darling Basin Ministerial Council*' prepared pursuant to section 43A(6)(c) and (d) of the Act; to give to Ministers and for publication on the Murray-Darling Basin's website in compliance with section 43A(6)(e) of the Act;
 - (c) **approved** the Guidelines for the method to determine priorities for applying environmental water accompanying the altered Proposed Basin Plan as a statutory requirement;
 - (d) **approved** sending copies of the:
 - (i) altered Proposed Basin Plan;
 - (ii) Proposed Basin Plan - *Authority's views and consultation on the matters raised by the Murray–Darling Basin Ministerial Council*; and
 - (iii) Guidelines for the method to determine priorities for applying environmental waterto members of the Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council on the 6 August 2012, pursuant to section 43A(6) of the Act, along with the transmission letter; and
 - (e) **approved** the publication on the 6 August 2012 of the following documents on the Murray-Darling Basin Authority website:
 - (i) Altered Proposed Basin Plan;

- (ii) Proposed Basin Plan - *Authority's views and consultation on the matters raised by the Murray–Darling Basin Ministerial Council*; and
- (iii) Guidelines for the method to determine priorities for applying environmental water.

Agenda Item 4: Other Business

- 7. No other business was discussed.

Agenda Item 5: Next Meeting

- 8. The Murray-Darling Basin Authority **confirmed** that the next Authority meeting will be held on Tuesday 4 September, 10.00am – 4.00pm in Canberra.

Meeting Close

- 9. The Chair **closed** the meeting at 11.05am.

ATTACHMENT H – AUTHORITY MEETING 55 – 22 AUGUST 2012 – TELECONFERENCE

Agenda Item 1: Opening of meeting, disclosure of interests and apologies

1. The Chair **opened** the meeting at 9.00am.

Conflict of Interest

2. No member declared any conflict of interest, actual or apparent, in relation to any items on the agenda.

Agenda Item 2: Adoption of draft agenda

3. The Murray–Darling Basin Authority **adopted** the agenda for meeting 55.

Agenda Item 3: Basin Plan update

4. Pursuant to section 41 and subsection 44(1) of the *Water Act 2007* (Cth) (Act), members **approved** giving to the Minister the Basin Plan for adoption, the documents prepared under paragraphs 43(11)(a) and 43A(6)(d) of the Act and the draft Explanatory Statement.

Agenda Item 4: Other Business

5. No other business was discussed.

Agenda Item 5: Next Meeting

6. The Murray-Darling Basin Authority **confirmed** that the next Authority teleconference meeting will be held on Wednesday 29 August, 9.30am – 11.30am.

Meeting Close

7. The Chair **closed** the meeting at 10.20am.

ATTACHMENT I – AUTHORITY MEETING 56 – 29 AUGUST 2012 – TELECONFERENCE

Agenda Item 1: Opening of meeting, disclosure of interests and apologies

1. The Chair **opened** the meeting at 9.35am.

Conflict of Interest

2. No member **declared** any conflict of interest, actual or apparent, in relation to any items on the agenda.

Agenda Item 2: Adoption of draft agenda

3. The Murray–Darling Basin Authority **adopted** the agenda for meeting 56.

Agenda Item 4: Other Business

4. No other business was discussed.

Agenda Item 5: Next Meeting

5. The Murray-Darling Basin Authority **confirmed** that the next Authority meeting will be held on Tuesday 4 September 2012 in Canberra.

Meeting Close

6. Prof Barry Hart left the teleconference at 11.20am.
7. The Chair **closed** the meeting at 11.25am.

ATTACHMENT J – AUTHORITY MEETING 57 – 4 SEPTEMBER 2012 –CANBERRA

Agenda Item 1: Opening of meeting, disclosure of interests and apologies

1. The Chair **opened** the meeting at 10.25 am.
Conflict of Interest
2. No member declared any conflict of interest, actual or apparent, in relation to any items on the agenda.

Agenda Item 2: Adoption of draft agenda

3. The Murray–Darling Basin Authority **adopted** the agenda for meeting 57.

Agenda Item 3: Confirmation of minutes of meeting 51, 52, 53, 54 and 55

4. The Murray-Darling Basin Authority **confirmed** the minutes from meetings:
 - (a) 51 – 28 June 2012
 - (b) 52 – 10 July 2012
 - (c) 53 - 30 July 2012
 - (d) 54 – 3 August 2012, and
 - (e) 55 – 22 August 2012.

Agenda Item 4: Chair’s report

5. The Chair **advised** he would report as relevant during the meeting.

Agenda Item 5: Chief Executive’s report

6. The Murray-Darling Basin Authority:
 - (a) **noted** the Chief Executive’s report, in particular the update on the Basin Officials’ Committee (BOC) review of arrangements for Murray-Darling Basin Joint Activities
 - (b) **welcomed** the review as a long overdue opportunity to further the water reform agenda and to establish the best arrangements for Basin-wide, integrated water resource management
 - (c) **noted** that the proposed timeframe for the BOC/Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council review extends beyond the current budget cycles of all jurisdictions and suggests that work be accelerated so as to meet the requirements of the Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council resolution of 29 June 2012
 - (d) **resolved** to seek early advice from all jurisdictions as to their proposed budget allocations for 2013-14, and

- (e) **resolved** to accelerate the Authority's consideration of optimal institutional arrangements for Basin-wide water resource management, including to enable the Authority's active participation in the review.

2.

Agenda Item 7: Engagement, Media and Communications update

- 7. The Murray-Darling Basin Authority **noted** the update on communication and engagement activities and members were **informed** that the planned meeting of the Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations (MLDRIN) annual general meeting had been moved, since the time of writing the paper, to the 10 & 11 October.
- 8. Members **discussed** MDBA's media and engagement activities looking forward and **noted** that both, the short-term and the long-term focus are important with the landscape changing again once the Basin Plan has been adopted and the implementation phase commences.

Agenda Item 8: MDBA Advisory Committees

Agenda Item 8.1: Basin Community Committee

- 9. This item was **deferred** to a later meeting date.

Agenda Item 8.2: Advisory Committee on Social, Economic and Environmental Sciences – selection of shortlisted candidates

10.

- 11. The Murray–Darling Basin Authority:

- (a) **agreed** to approach four potential members of the ACSEES, and
- (b) **noted** the potential to co-opt and engage other key individuals through thematic discussion forums that will support the work of the ACSEES.

Agenda Item 8.3: Northern Basin Advisory Committee update

- 12. The Murray-Darling Basin Authority **noted** the update on the northern Basin program and **noted** that members are invited to attend the first meeting of the committee to be held on 27 & 28 September 2012 in Canberra.

Agenda Item 9: Briefing on emergency preparedness and River Murray System Emergency Action Plan

- 13. The Murray–Darling Basin Authority **noted** current emergency preparedness.

Agenda Item 10: Other Business

- 14. There were no other items of business.

Agenda Item 11: Next Meeting

- 15. The Murray-Darling Basin Authority **confirmed** the next meeting will be held on Tuesday 2 October 2012 in Adelaide.

Meeting Closed

The Chair **closed** the meeting at 4.05pm.

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

Program: Division or Agency: MDBA

**Question 312
No:**

Topic: MDBA - South Eastern Australian
Climate Initiative

Proof Hansard Page and Date Written

or Written Question:

Senator Joyce asked:

1. When will Phase 2 of the South Eastern Australian Climate Initiative be completed?

Answer:

1. The South Eastern Australian Climate Initiative (SEACI) program along with all contracted research milestones officially concluded in September 2012.

The final synthesis report, launched on 14 September 2012 is available at <http://www.seaci.org/> marked the finalisation of the program.

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

Program: Division or Agency: MDBA **Question No:** 313

Topic: Sustainable Rivers Audit report to the
Natural Resource Management
Committee

Proof Hansard Page and Date Written

or Written Question:

Senator Joyce asked:

1. Has the MDBA distributed the Sustainable Rivers Audit report to the Natural Resource Management Committee, the Basin Officials Committee or any other committees? Was the Sustainable Rivers Audit report submitted to the Ministerial Council meeting in June as required? If not, why not?
2. When will the Sustainable Rivers Audit be released?

Answer:

1. The Murray-Darling Basin Authority (the Authority) has distributed the Sustainable Rivers Audit (SRA) Report to the SRA Joint Venture Committee, the Natural Resource Management Committee and the Basin Officials Committee for consultation and feedback in the lead up to submission to Ministerial Council. The SRA Report was submitted in November 2012 instead of June 2012, due to some changes that required an extension of the timeline for completion. On 30 November 2012 the Ministerial Council endorsed the release of the SRA report 2.
2. The SRA Report was released on 30 November 2012 on the Authority's website.

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

Program: Division or Agency: MDBA **Question No:** 314

Topic: Living Murray Initiative

Proof Hansard Page and Date Written

or Written Question:

Senator Joyce asked:

1. How much of the 402 GL allocated under the Living Murray was used in 2011-12?
2. Has any water allocated not been able to be used or carried over under the Living Murray Initiative for 2010-11 and 2011-12? If so how much water has not been used or carried over?
3. How much water under the Living Murray Initiative has been carried over to 2012-13?
4. How much water do you expect to be allocated under the Living Murray Initiative in 2012-13 and how much do you expect to use?

Answer:

1. 366 GL was allocated against The Living Murray (TLM) entitlements in 2011-2012. 274 GL of this allocation was used in 2011-12. (Please note that 402 GL was the total volume available to TLM in **2010-11**, including carryover)
- 2a. Partly as a result of floods in the Darling River system and improved inflows into the Murray River system, a significant volume of allocation only became available in the second half of 2009-10. It was therefore decided to carry over 85 GL of environmental water into 2010-11. As part of the Victorian carryover rules 3 GL was charged for evaporative losses, so therefore 82 GL was carried over.
- 2b. Significant flooding occurred in 2010-11 which meant that many of the sites planned for watering were inundated naturally. During 2010-11, 20 GL of TLM allocation "spilled" in Victorian Spillable Water Accounts, which provides environmental benefits as it creates a pulse when the dam spills. A further 33 GL could not be carried over due to limits set on NSW entitlements and this volume returns to the consumptive pool for reallocation. A total of 88 GL was carried over to 2011-12, of which 3 GL was debited for Victorian evaporative charges.

In both instances the carryover of environmental water provided the opportunity to undertake larger spring watering actions which could maximise the ecological benefits that could be obtained.

3. Recently updated figures show almost 124GL was carried over from 2011-2012 into 2012-2013 water year.

4. As of 1 November 2012, 348 GL of allocation had become available on the TLM portfolio (inclusive of carryover). In addition to this, 18 GL was carried over in Victorian Spillable Water Accounts (SWA). 11 GL of this SWA volume has subsequently spilt and the remaining volume (7 GL) is currently not yet available..

To date 332GL of this water has been committed for environmental watering actions during the spring/ summer period. TLM is also currently planning environmental watering actions in autumn.

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

Program: Division or Agency: MDBA **Question No:** 315

Topic: Cap models for South Australia and the ACT

Proof Hansard Page and Date Written

or Written Question:

Senator Joyce asked:

1. When does the MDBA expect that cap models for South Australia and the ACT might be concluded? Will it be before the finalisation of the Basin Plan?

Answer:

1. There are four cap valleys in South Australia, Metro Adelaide, Country Towns, Lower Murray Swamps and 'All Other Purposes'. Out of these two, Country Towns and Lower Murray Swamps, do not require a cap model. The 'All Other Purposes' was approved in November 2004. The Metro Adelaide Cap model is in advanced stage of preparation and likely to be submitted to the Murray-Darling Basin Authority (the Authority) by February 2013 for audit and approval.

The Australian Capital Territory cap model was submitted to the Authority in October 2012 for audit and approval.

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

Program: Division or Agency: MDBA **Question 316**
No:

Topic: Annual inflows into the Murray-Darling

Proof Hansard Page and Date Written

or Written Question:

Senator Joyce asked:

1. Can you please provide the Committee the modelled annual inflows into the Murray-Darling for every year since 1895? Please include up to the latest year possible.

Answer:

1. Time series data for modelled annual inflows into the Murray-Darling Basin river systems for 1895 to 2009 period is at **Attachment A**. A complete analysis of the data to 2012 is a major exercise involving synthesising flows for two years for hundreds of flow, rainfall and evaporation sites across the basin and updating 24 models. It is envisaged that this work will be undertaken in mid 2013. However, the Murray-Darling Basin Authority has made preliminary estimates for flows during 2010 and 2011 using correlations of observed flows in the Murray and Lower Darling with historical inflow data. Based on this analysis, it is estimated that in 2009/10 and 2010/11 Murray-Darling Basin inflows would have been approximately 23,000 gigalitres/year and 47,000 gigalitres/year respectively. The long term average flow for 1895 to 2009 period is estimated at 32,533 gigalitres/year. So the 2009/10 and 2010/11 inflows are within the range of historical range of flows and would not significantly influence the long term average.

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

Program: Division or Agency: MDBA **Question No:** 317

Topic: Advisory Committee on Social,
Economic and Environmental
Sciences

**Proof Hansard Page and Date
or Written Question:** Written

Senator Joyce asked:

1. Has the MDBA appointed members to the Advisory Committee on Social, Economic and Environmental Sciences yet. If so who has been appointed?

Answer:

1. As at October 2012, arrangements for the Advisory Committee on Social, Economic, and Environmental Sciences (ACSEES) were well advanced.

The Murray-Darling Basin Authority has identified a shortlist of potential members and has entered into discussions with those potential members, and the formal appointment process is in train.

It is expected that formal appointments will be concluded by December 2012.

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

Program: Division or Agency: MDBA

Question No: 318

Topic: MDBA - easement purchases

Proof Hansard Page and Date Written

or Written Question:

Senator Joyce asked:

1. Can the MDBA please provide a list of all of the areas where they are currently seeking or negotiating to purchase additional easements for environmental watering purposes? How much land is the MDBA seeking access to? How much has the government budgeted to conclude these easement purchases?

Answer:

1. The Murray-Darling Basin Authority is investigating easements associated with the Gunbower Forest and Koondrook-Perricoota flood enhancement works as well as the river reach from Hume Dam to Yarrawonga Weir. The total land area and budget to conclude any purchases is not yet finalised consistent with the status of the work. The need for further easements will be examined as a component of the Constraints Management Strategy, as required by the Murray-Darling Basin Plan.

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

Program: Division or Agency: MDBA

Question No: 319

Topic: MDBA - operational deficits

Proof Hansard Page and Date Written

or Written Question:

Senator Joyce asked:

1. Why has the MDBA sought Ministerial approval to run operational deficits over the forward estimates?
2. How much do these operational deficits amount to?
3. Could you provide the brief provided to the Minister titled "Approval for the Murray-Darling Basin Authority to Incur Revised Operating Deficits in 2011-12, 2012-13, 2013-14 and 2014-15"?

Answer:

1. Ministerial approval was sought to run operational deficits over the forward estimates to complete projects related to the Living Murray Environmental Works and Measure Program (EWMP). In December 2008 as part of transition from the Murray-Darling Basin Commission (MDBC) to the Murray-Darling Basin Authority (the Authority), \$441 million held by the MDBC for major capital projects including EWMP was transferred to the Authority. The funds were recorded as revenue in the Authority's 2008-09 financial accounts which resulted in an operational surplus in 2008-09. The Authority has budgeted for, and incurred, operating deficits since 2009-10 reflecting the expenditure to complete the capital projects.
2. The operating deficit that was sought in the brief totalled \$106.281million across the period 2011-12 to 2014-15.
3. In line with normal conventions Ministerial briefings are not released.