

## Issue

An overview of the Murray Darling Basin ('MDB') planning process and how the NSW Farmers' Association (the 'Association') is involved.

## Background

The Basin Plan will be a strategic plan for the integrated and sustainable management of water resources in the Murray-Darling Basin. The Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) will prepare the plan, as required by the *Water Act 2007* (Cwlth). The plan will be prepared in consultation with Basin States and Communities.

The *Water Act 2007* specifies some content of the Basin Plan, including:

- limits on the amount of water (both surface water and groundwater) that can be taken from Basin water resources on a sustainable basis;
- identification of risks to Basin water resources, such as climate change, and strategies to manage those risks;
- requirements that state water resource plans will need to comply with if they are to be accredited under this Act;
- an environmental watering plan to optimise environmental outcomes for the Basin;
- a water quality and salinity management plan; and
- rules about trading of water rights in relation to Basin water resources.

The Basin Plan, amongst other things, will outline a Sustainable Diversion Limit (SDL) for each of the 19 Catchments in the Basin (see *Appendix 1* for map). These SDLs will determine how much water is available for consumptive uses in the Basin, after the needs of the environment have been fulfilled. The 19 Valleys in the Basin include:

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|--|---|
| • Moonie- QLD                            | • <b>Lachlan- NSW</b>                   |
| • <b>Condamine/ Balonne- QLD and NSW</b> | • <b>Murrumbidgee/ ACT- NSW and ACT</b> |
| • <b>Warrego- QLD and NSW</b>            | • <b>Murray- NSW, Victoria and SA</b>   |
| • <b>Paroo- QLD and NSW</b>              | • Ovens- Vic                            |
| • <b>Border Rivers- QLD and NSW</b>      | • Goulburn/ Broken- Vic                 |
| • <b>Gwydir- NSW</b>                     | • Loddon- Vic                           |
| • <b>Namoi- NSW</b>                      | • Campaspe- Vic                         |
| • <b>Macquarie/ Castlereagh- NSW</b>     | • Wimmera/ Avoca- Vic                   |
| • <b>Barwon/ Darling- NSW</b>            | • Eastern Mount Lofty Ranges- SA        |
| • <b>Lower Darling- NSW</b>              |   |

The Proposed Basin Plan will be released in two parts:

1. *Guide to the Proposed Basin Plan*- currently set to be released in "early August" the guide will be written in plain English and feature key content of the Proposed Basin Plan including:
  - proposed Sustainable Diversion Limits on water use;
  - environmental watering requirements;
  - the minimum supply of water required to meet critical human water needs;
  - water quality and salinity objectives; and
  - separate, detailed guides for each of the Basin's 19 catchments.
2. *Proposed Basin Plan*- The proposed plan itself is currently scheduled to be released sometime around November 2010.

Following the release of the Proposed Basin Plan there will be a 16-week consultation period during which time the MDBA will be taking the Basin Plan out into regional communities in the Basin via regional meetings.

## Concerns about the Basin Planning Process

The Association is concerned about the MDBA's interpretation of the *Water Act 2007*, particularly in regard to the following section:

***Water Act 2007 (Commonwealth)***

***Section 3 Objects***

- (c) in giving effect to those agreements, to promote the use and management of the Basin water resources in a way that optimises economic, social and environmental outcomes*
- (d) without limiting paragraph (b) or (c):*
  - (i) to ensure the return to environmentally sustainable levels of extraction for water resources that are over allocated or overused; and*
  - (ii) to protect, restore and provide for the ecological values and ecosystem services of the Murray-Darling Basin (taking into account, in particular, the impact that the taking of water has on the watercourses, lakes, wetlands, ground water and water-dependent ecosystems that are part of the Basin water resources and on associated biodiversity); and*
  - (iii) subject to subparagraphs (i) and (ii)—to maximise the net economic returns to the Australian community from the use and management of the Basin water resources;*

The Association believes that the Basin Plan must optimise economic, social and environmental outcomes in the Basin. However, it is clear from discussions with the MDBA and involvement in the process to date that in developing the draft Basin Plan, the MDBA is focussing almost solely on the environmental requirements of the Basin, with economic and social requirements being considered as an afterthought.

## What the Association is Doing

On 2 March 2010, the Association issued a media release titled '[Water Plan Process Flawed](#)'. This release outlined the Association's concerns regarding the current Basin planning process and called for the draft Basin Plan to be deferred until such time as the objects of the *Water Act* (i.e. optimisation of economic, social and environmental outcomes) could be delivered. A very similar release was also issued by the National Farmers' Federation (the 'NFF').

The Association is campaigning at the local level to increase awareness of the Basin Planning Process and engage as many stakeholders as possible in the fight to protect the interests of farmers and regional communities in the MDB.

A central focus of this campaign is the Association's Murray-Darling Basin Survey. The survey is designed to gather social and economic information from farmers within the MDB so that we can develop an independent view of the potential impacts of the Basin Plan. You can help us by taking time to complete the Association's Survey which is available on the website.

The Association has also been working to collate background information on the MDBA defined catchments in NSW, in preparation for our response to the Proposed Basin Plan later this year. In the process of gathering this information we have stumbled across a significant issue- no data exists for some of these previously undefined catchments. The Association has written to the Prime Minister, Julia Gillard seeking urgent attention to this issue as this data will be critical in any response to the Proposed Basin Plan.

## What Members Can Do

The Basin Plan will have dramatic and varied impacts on all communities within the MDB. When the Basin Plan is released in mid-2010, there will be a 16-week consultation period in which to respond. The Association will be devoting a large amount of resources and energy into ensuring the interests of our Members are looked after in this process. The assistance of Members within the various valleys is crucial in ensuring that we have an 'on ground perspective'. The draft Plan will include a chapter on each of the 19 Valleys in the Basin.

The MDBA has indicated that all submissions regarding the Basin Plan will be considered in equal context. The Association therefore encourages Members who are interested in this issue to remain abreast of

developments and consider making individual representations about how the draft Basin Plan could affect your business.

As mentioned above, the Association will be preparing background information on each of the 12 NSW Valleys in the Basin. The Association will be seeking input from Members in these regions to ensure that these documents are as relevant as possible.

Members who are interested in assisting the Association in the preparation and review of these documents should contact Richard Widows via the Association's Member Service Centre on 1300 794 000 or by emailing [widowsr@nswfarmers.org.au](mailto:widowsr@nswfarmers.org.au).

### Further Information on the MDB Planning Process

The following information sources are hyperlinked and will take you straight to the relevant website.

#### National

- [The Murray Darling Basin Authority](#)- plans for the management of water resources in the Murray-Darling Basin. This site has a large number of reports that discuss the development of the Basin Plan, of particular interest are:
  - [Socioeconomic context for the Murray-Darling Basin](#)
  - [Sustainable Diversion Limits- Issues Paper](#)
  - [The MDBA interpretation of the Water Act 2007 as it applies to the Basin Plan](#)
  - [All reports and fact sheets are available here](#)
- [The Department of the Environment, Water Heritage and the Arts](#)- the Australian Government department responsible for water policy development and administration of Commonwealth programs.
- [Australian Competition and Consumer Commission](#)- statutory responsibility under the Water Act 2007 to provide advice on water market and trading rules.
- [The Bureau of Meteorology - Water Information](#)- collects data relevant to water trading and resources.
- [National Water Commission](#)- advisory and audit role
- [The National Water Market Website](#)- a COAG initiative aimed at improving the efficiency of water registers, transactions and market information functions.

#### New South Wales

- [Office of Water](#)- an office within the NSW Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water responsible for sustainable water management.
- [State Water](#)- a Rural Water Utility, owned by the New South Wales Government, delivering water for rural, agricultural and environmental use across the state.
- [Who's who of Irrigation in NSW](#)- from the NSW Irrigator's Council Website, this page provides a one stop shop for irrigation contacts, both in NSW and Federally.

Appendix 1- Valleys in the MDB and the Key Environmental Assets as defined by the MDBA

