

MEDIA RELEASE

Embargoed until 4pm AEDST, 8 October 2010



Basin Plan Guide released for public discussion

The Murray-Darling Basin Authority today released for public consultation and discussion the landmark first-stage document in the process of establishing a plan to secure the long term health of Australia's food and fibre bowl.

Authority Chair Mike Taylor launched the "Guide to the Proposed Basin Plan" at the National Convention Centre in Canberra.

"I want to emphasise that the release of this Guide provides an opportunity for Australians to contribute to one of the most significant water reforms in our history," he said.

"I also want to emphasise that the proposals presented in this Guide are not a done deal," he said.

"The Guide covers all the items the Act requires the Basin Plan to cover. This includes an assessment, using the best available science, of the amount of water that represents an environmentally sustainable level of take for consumptive uses such as town use, irrigation and industrial use.

Mr Taylor said the document sets out in plain English the main elements of the proposed Basin Plan which will be released later in the year.

"One of the most critical and controversial issues that the Authority has to develop is the sustainable diversion limits or SDLs.

"These are long term average volumes of water that can be used for consumptive purposes after the environmental water requirements have been met.

"In the Guide the Authority is presenting an SDL proposal that is a range, and the Authority believes that a Basin-wide SDL within that range will meet the requirements of the Act.

"That range is a reduction in current diversion limits of between 3,000 GL/y and 4,000 GL/y.

"This represents a reduction on current diversion limits of between 22% and 29%."

Mr Taylor said the current diversion limits include the full range of water taken for consumption – including watercourse diversions, floodplain harvesting and so called interceptions – that is, water taken by farm dams and by forestry.

The SDL numbers will be different for different catchments. This is because the Authority has first looked at what water is required to meet the health of the individual tributaries, then looked at what is needed for the overall health of the Basin, influenced by the different level of development in different catchments and the different hydrological features of the catchments.

The Guide provides a proposed range for each of the so called sustainable diversion limit areas – for surface water there are 29 SDL areas and for groundwater there are 78 SDL areas.

The SDLs for the 29 SDL areas vary from reductions that equate to 0% of the current diversion limits (that is, no reduction) to a range of 26% to 35% reductions in some catchments.

For groundwater there are only 11 SDL areas in which the Authority is putting forward proposed reductions in current diversion limits. The reductions represented by these SDLs vary across the different aquifers with none greater than 40%.

“It should be understood that these sustainable diversion limits won’t come into effect until they are implemented in state water resource plans,” Mr Taylor said.

“How they actually impact on individual water entitlement holders will be set out in those state water resource plans.

“In the meantime I urge any group or individuals with an interest or stake in the future of the Basin to study the Guide carefully and to provide us with thoughts, opinions and any other feedback which will help us to prepare the best possible Proposed Basin Plan for release early next year,” Mr Taylor said.

“To kick start the process, from early next week expert staff from the Authority will embark on a series of public information sessions at regional centres throughout the Basin.”

Below is the schedule of the first round of sessions to be held from next week (details for each meeting are available at www.mdba.gov.au/communities/meetings-events):

12 October - Shepparton	29 October - Albury
13 October - Deniliquin	1 November - Brisbane
14 October - Griffith	3 November - Sydney
15 October - Renmark	4 November - Dubbo
20 October - Narrabri	4 November - Forbes
21 October - St George	5 November - Bourke
21 October - Moree	8 November - Echuca
22 October - Dalby	8 November - Horsham
25 October - Adelaide	9 November - Narrandera
26 October - Murray Bridge	11 November - ACT Region
27 October - Mildura	tba - Goondiwindi
28 October - Melbourne	

A copy of the Guide and other information is available of download at www.mdba.gov.au

For more information contact the MDBA Media office on (02) 6279 0141 or email medialiasion@mdba.gov.au



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