

AUTHORITY-IN-CONFIDENCE

*Minutes Murray–Darling Basin Authority meeting 30a – 11 April 2011*

**Murray–Darling Basin Authority  
Meeting 30a – 11 April 2011 – Teleconference**

**Minutes**

**Members in Attendance:** Chair, The Hon Craig Knowles; Chief Executive, Mr Rob Freeman; Ms Di Davidson; Professor Barry Hart; and Mr David Green.

**Authority Secretary:** Mr James Flintoft, Executive Coordinator, Cabinet Implementation Unit, Strategic Policy and Implementation, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

**Agency Staff:** [REDACTED]; Dr Fraser MacLeod, Executive Director, Basin Plan; Ms Liz Dann, Executive Director, Special Projects; Mr Tony Webster, General Manager, Social and Economic Analysis; and [REDACTED]

**Others:** [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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**Agenda Item 3: Discussion of Meeting 30 Agenda Item 7, Basin Plan, Continued**

**Agenda Item 3.1: Discussion of Meeting 30 Agenda Item 7.1: Surface water SDLs — Methods for Distributing ESLT**

4. The Murray–Darling Basin Authority revisited agenda item 7.1 and **agreed** that, for the purposes of consultation with Basin jurisdictions and testing with appropriate stakeholders, in the northern Basin (above Menindee Lakes), SDLs would be based mainly on satisfying internal environmental water requirements with no further reductions specifically for downstream requirements in the Barwon-Darling.
5. The Murray–Darling Basin Authority **agreed** that this policy position would be maintained unless new information became available, or new issues emerged.
6. The Murray–Darling Basin Authority **agreed** to the Chair's suggestion that the Authority organise a meeting of some 10-12 high-level water scientists to interrogate the hydrological modelling data, with the aim of validating it or otherwise determining its level of robustness. It was further **agreed** that similar validation be sought from the states, through the Basin Officials Committee, who had indicated their support for hydrological modelling in feedback on the *Guide to the proposed Basin Plan*. These meetings should be held before the end of April, so that the results could be provided to the next ministerial forum which is to be held in the first week of May. The Chair

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indicated he wished to give further thought to a second larger scientific forum for a broader group of stakeholders, perhaps in early May. Following validation and acceptance of the science, a broader commentary or narrative would need to be crafted to describe the 'on-ground' practical impact for local communities on a catchment by catchment basis.

**Agenda Item 3.2: Discussion of Meeting 30 Agenda Item 7.6: ESLT — Volume, Including Social and Economic Considerations**

7. Professor Barry Hart **thanked** officers of the Authority for the detailed briefing that he had received the preceding Thursday, 7 April 2011 on the scientific reasoning for the scale of change advocated in agenda paper 7.6 from Authority meeting 30. He **explained** the comments he had added to the notes of that meeting (prepared by the Executive Director Basin Plan, Dr MacLeod), a copy of which he had emailed to members prior to this meeting.
8. In considering the scale of change, members **discussed** some of the actions to be taken by the Authority or recommended to governments, to ensure the best environmental outcomes can be achieved in the Basin.
9. Members again **discussed** the table set out in paragraph 38 of the agenda paper for Item 7.6. There was general agreement that system constraints in the northern Basin, which could not be overcome by investments in works and measures or by policy changes, might be in the order of 180 GL. Members also were in general agreement that ascribing a volume to recognition of effort by individuals to improve on-farm environmental outcomes was arbitrary and should be accounted for elsewhere.
10. A paper on the *Pros and cons for including an in-catchment health cap on reductions* had been circulated to members prior to the meeting. After considerable discussion, members **agreed** that selecting a Basin-wide figure of 20% as a threshold on the degree of change of local watercourse diversions in recognition of local social and economic impacts appeared to be arbitrary and therefore not particularly useful. Members **requested** that, instead, the office provide a spreadsheet on the impact of a 20% threshold on an individual catchment basis, with particular emphasis on those catchments which were known to be the most affected (i.e. Murrumbidgee, Goulburn Valley and Condamine–Balonne), to determine what amelioration measures might be required in each. Members again **noted** that should a different number be selected for ESLT than that given in the Guide, then an incontestable explanation for that change would need to be provided.

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