

Communique: Murray–Darling Basin Ministers agree next steps

Published: 16 June 2017 • Communiqués

Contact MDBA media

[Email the MDBA media team](#)

[Phone MDBA media — \(02\) 6279 0141](#)

The Murray–Darling Basin Ministerial Council met in Canberra today to progress implementation of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan.

The Ministerial Council is chaired by the Hon. Barnaby Joyce MP (Commonwealth). Other members attending were the Hon. Niall Blair MP (NSW), the Hon. Lisa Neville MP (Victoria), the Hon. Ian Hunter (South Australia), the Hon. Dr Anthony Lynham (Queensland) and Mr Mick Gentlemen MLA (ACT). Senator the Hon. Anne Ruston, Assistant Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources (Commonwealth) was also in attendance.

A key step in progressing a credible pathway to deliver the Basin Plan, as recently endorsed by Council of Australian Governments, was taken today when Ministers endorsed the final package of Sustainable Diversion Limit (SDL) Adjustment Mechanism projects. Through projects such as environmental works and changes to river operational rules, the SDL Adjustment Mechanism enables environmental outcomes to be delivered in a way that eliminates the need for further water recovery in the southern Basin to achieve the objectives of the Basin Plan.

Basin governments have identified ways to achieve environmental outcomes and to reduce the impacts of floods through pre releases and different flow regimes that better mimic natural conditions without impacting long and short term reliability. These changes combined with the full SDL Adjustment Mechanism package have further generated environmental benefit.

Preliminary advice on the SDL Adjustment Mechanism projects from the Murray–Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) indicates the package is likely to achieve an SDL offset in excess of 600 gigalitres (GL). The latest advice has provided Ministers with a high level of confidence that the final SDL Adjustment Mechanism outcome, combined with remaining contracted water recovery projects, will be sufficient to fully offset the remaining water recovery 'gap' in the southern Basin.

Ministers reiterated the importance of the integrity of the package of projects and ongoing consultation with stakeholders and local communities. Community input is critical to the ongoing detailed design and implementation of projects to ensure any third party impacts are appropriately mitigated. Basin governments and the MDBA will work in partnership to provide information to communities about how they can contribute. Ministers emphasised the need to safeguard economic, environmental, social and cultural outcomes from these projects. Implementation must take an adaptive and consultative approach between now and 2024.

Ministers requested officials work towards finalising Commonwealth-state funding arrangements for SDL adjustment projects, and to report to the next Council meeting on an agreed approach to implementation.

Basin governments will notify the package of SDL Adjustment projects to the MDBA by 30 June 2017. The MDBA will complete their modelling and assessment, consult Basin governments, and then undertake formal public consultation in October-November 2017 on the proposed SDL Adjustment offset outcome. The MDBA will provide advice to Ministerial Council on progress in November 2017. The MDBA will then propose amendments to the Commonwealth water minister for adoption by 15 December 2017. Ministers have committed to undertake focused engagement on the package of projects ahead of formal public consultation.

Ministers noted that EY was recently appointed to undertake an independent expert analysis of efficiency measures in accordance with the agreed Terms of Reference, and will report back to the Council in December 2017. Senior partners from EY presented to Ministers on the process for undertaking the study.

Ministers discussed the cultural importance of the Basin for Aboriginal people and agreed to increase the Ministerial Council's focus on Aboriginal engagement to improve the inclusion of Aboriginal interests in water resource management. Ministers will receive further advice at future meetings about Aboriginal values in the Basin Plan in order to achieve cultural and economic outcomes without impacting existing rights.

Ministers discussed the MDBA's recommended amendments to the Basin Plan, including outcomes from the Northern Basin Review. Ministers reaffirmed their previous commitment that any changes arising from the Northern Basin Review should have no negative impacts on triple bottom line outcomes in the southern basin. If any negative impacts are identified they will be addressed by the MDBA as part of the established review processes of the Basin Plan.

In considering the proposed Basin Plan amendments, Ministers made an in-principle commitment to the implementation of a comprehensive suite of new projects for the northern Basin, subject to funding being available. These agreed projects (referred to as 'toolkit measures'), target improved water management and environmental outcomes across the northern Basin.

The next step will be for the MDBA to consider Ministers' feedback on the proposed amendments, before providing a final proposed amendment to the Commonwealth water minister for decision.

ACT and NSW Ministers advised they have reached in principle agreement to the establishment of interstate trade between ACT and NSW. They will work together to develop necessary protocols in line with the Basin Plan trading rules by mid 2019. To enable the interstate trading and associated protocols to be actioned in a harmonised manner, the ACT advised that it will seek to align the submission and accreditation timeframe for the new ACT Water Resource Plan with the existing timeframe for the new NSW Murrumbidgee plan - that is by mid 2019.

Ministers reaffirmed their support for complementary environmental projects in the Basin. Ministers will consider further advice at future meetings on how to best embed complementary measures in Basin Plan implementation.

[A list of SDL Adjustment Mechanism projects](#) will be published on the MDBA website by 30 June 2017 as per the formal notification.

The Council of Australian Government's - *Implementing the Basin Plan Report* can be found at www.mdba.gov.au/MincoreportBP.

The agreed Terms of Reference for Analysis of Efficiency Measures can be found at www.agriculture.gov.au/water/mdb.

Ends

<https://www.mdba.gov.au/media/mr/communique-murray-darling-basin-ministers-agree-next-steps>