

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY GOVERNMENT

**SUBMISSION TO THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN
MURRAY-DARLING BASIN ROYAL COMMISSION**

October 2018

SUMMARY

The ACT Government welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the South Australian Murray-Darling Basin Royal Commission.

The Australian Capital Territory Government would like to highlight:

1. The ACT Government supports the objectives of the Basin Plan and has endeavoured to implement the requirements relevant to the ACT. It remains committed to working collaboratively with the other Basin States and the Murray-Darling Basin Authority to ensure the successful implementation of the Basin Plan.
2. The ACT is a unique jurisdiction in the Basin because of a number of factors:
 - a. a high proportion of urban residential water use;
 - b. a low proportion of farm/irrigation water use;
 - c. provision of water for the environment as a first priority; and
 - d. a net sustainable diversion limit.
3. The ACT is expected to submit its water resource plans by the end of February 2019.
4. The ACT has not been directly involved as a proponent of any of the supply or constraints measures projects under the SDL adjustment processes.
5. Since the June 2018 Ministerial Council meeting the ACT is investigating the feasibility of providing up to 15 gigalitres as water efficiency measures as part of the required 62 gigalitres by June 2019.
6. The ACT strongly supports the role of interstate water trading to supplement water needs for future growth and climate variability.

Further information on the ACT's support and fulfilment of implementation requirements can be found on publicly released material, in particular on the Murray– Darling Basin Authority website.

INTRODUCTION

The ACT Government welcomes the opportunity provided by Commissioner Bret Walker SC to provide a written submission on the operations and effectiveness of the Murray–Darling Basin Plan (the Basin Plan).

The ACT Government has supported the overarching objective of the Basin Plan from its commencement in 2012 and the subsequent implementation agreement in 2013. It has maintained that support through the various forums especially as reflected in the recent ACT commitment at the last Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council meeting where we opted to investigate the provision of 15 gegalitres as part of the provision of water efficiency measures. Since the commencement of the Basin Plan the ACT has endeavoured to fulfil its full range of commitments as required as reflected in the annual implementation milestone reports.

The ACT Government is committed to working with all relevant jurisdictions to implement the plan on time and in full. In this context, the ACT Government would like to acknowledge the ongoing work of the Murray–Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) in overseeing the complex task of implementing the Basin Plan in conjunction with the basin states. The ACT has sought and continues to maintain a collaborative partnership with the MDBA.

The ACT Government supports the Murray–Darling Basin water reforms and the objective to optimise social, economic and environmental outcomes.

BACKGROUND

The ACT occupies only a relatively small part of the southern Basin, with only about 66 kilometres of the upper Murrumbidgee River within ACT borders of its overall length of 1485 kilometres.

Inflows from the Murrumbidgee River and tributaries from the ACT flow into New South Wales at Halls Crossing, some 50 kilometres upstream of Burrinjuck Dam in New South Wales.

The Murrumbidgee River flows into the ACT are severely constrained by the operations of Tantangara Dam which is operated by Snowy Hydro Limited. When the ACT was founded the site was chosen because of the general availability of water in the upper Murrumbidgee catchment and the streams flowing from the Brindabella Ranges. The historical selection of the site and boundaries for the ACT as the national capital was based on the requirement for a secure water supply.

The ACT and Queanbeyan Region is by far the largest population centre within the Murray-Darling Basin and is one of the fastest population growth regions across Australia. The ACT

predominately requires water for residential water use and national capital administrative functions.

Population growth along with climate change is a significant factor in future water planning. The ACT only uses about 0.1 per cent of the long term average inflows into the Basin and less than one per cent of available water in the total Murrumbidgee catchment.

The agricultural sector and related water use is comparatively small with only about 5 gegalitres allocated for non-urban water use.

The ACT through its utility, Icon Water, also provides water supply to the Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council area in New South Wales and that supply is accounted as part of the ACT's sustainable diversion limit.

Canberra aspires to be an exemplar of a water sensitive city with an increased focus on green infrastructure, sustainable urban water management and water sensitive urban design.

Unlike other Basin States the ACT's water planning and management is based on providing for the needs of the environment as a first priority before allocations are determined for consumptive uses. This has enabled the ACT to avoid over-allocation problems. The ACT's net consumptive use is only approximately 20 gegalitres of the average annual inflows of 492 gegalitres per annum.

The ACT has provided its share of environmental flow contributions including The Living Murray Initiative contribution of 2 gegalitres and was the first jurisdiction to provide its shared reduction amount of 4.9 gegalitres as required under the Basin Plan. This water is held on the New South Wales register for use by the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder. It now requires the formal recognition of water held to fully account for this purpose.

The ACT has only one RAMSAR site which is the Mount Ginnini Flats which is high in the catchment and not actually located on the river course.

Groundwater use in the ACT is under 2 gegalitres with all groundwater extractions licensed and metered.

A map of the ACT water management areas is at **Appendix A**.

COMMITMENTS AND EFFORTS OF THE ACT

The ACT has participated in all Basin Plan implementation requirements and activities applicable to the ACT. The ACT has provided all necessary reports and has a process to ensure that SDL reporting is in place.

Water Resource Plans (WRP)

The ACT has two water resource plans, for surface water and groundwater, to be submitted by 28 February 2019.

A draft ACT WRP was released for public consultation in June 2016 and includes accounting and compliance for the SDLs for surface and groundwater, Indigenous water values and uses, a water quality management plan and environmental watering plan.

As the ACT is located within the New South Wales Murrumbidgee catchment, coordination of water resource planning and management between the ACT and NSW is critical.

To ensure that there is coordination with New South Wales and their Murrumbidgee River Water Resource Plan the timing of the ACT's water resource plans has been aligned with both now due to be accredited by June 2019.

This has enabled the ACT to update some of its key water management instruments such as the revision of its environmental flow guidelines. The ACT is confident that it can provide its water resource plans by the required date.

The ACT has also contributed to improving and streamlining the WRP assessment process.

Basin Compliance Compact

The requirements for improved compliance on the ACT are not as significant compared to some other Basin States due to the traditionally high levels of metering, and compliance and enforcement but nevertheless, the ACT is committed to meeting the relevant compliance requirements as set out in the Compliance Compact.

The ACT is committed to ensuring that its water measurement and compliance frameworks are effective and uphold public confidence in water management across the state.

SDL Adjustment measures - Supply/constraints measures

Because of its location, hydrology and water use (very little irrigation) the ACT has not directly been involved as a proponent in the development of these measures that make up the projects to use water more efficiently in the Basin.

Specific matters of concern for the ACT

The ACT has a number of specific concerns. These are:

1. The determination of the ACT's sustainable diversion limit for groundwater by the MDBA of 3.16 GL and the subsequent treatment of analysis prepared by the ACT challenging this volume. The ACT prepared a report in 2016 on our groundwater resources based on most recent data and analysis for assessment. The report seeks

a review and change in the SDL for groundwater. MDBA have decided not to review the report until 2020 at the earliest.

2. The slow progress being made to develop and support interstate water trading between the ACT and NSW. Water Trade Rules are covered in Chapter 12 of the Basin Plan. Noting the recent progress in this area and positive working relationship between NSW and ACT.
3. There has been a strong reluctance by the MDBA to investigate the impact of Tantangara Dam on the environment flows in the Upper Murrumbidgee River and also to pursue the impacts of the Snowy Hydro Scheme in the Basin Plan
4. Unlike for the rest of the Basin, the ACT was set a "net" SDL which has an impact on the scope of water planning and water management for example the net SDL discourages measures to reduce sewerage returns to the river system.

Other related works and programs

The ACT Healthy Waterways project is a \$93.5 million joint initiative of the Australian and ACT governments to protect and improve long term water quality in the ACT and Murrumbidgee River System. The project will reduce the level of nutrients and pollutants entering ACT and region lakes and waterways that, in turn, have a significant impact on the Murrumbidgee and broader Murray-Darling Basin. The first phase of the five-year project was completed in February 2016. Detailed information and community feedback about ACT waterways was gathered and assessed and a wide range of potential water management options developed. The second implementation phase has now commenced and will see 20 new infrastructure and water management projects, as well as programs to raise awareness about water quality issues and how residents, business and visitors can help look after ACT and region waterways.

SUBMISSION ENDS

Appendix A - ACT Water management areas



