

## Basin plan to be watered down – Weekly Times

Peter Hunt

[http://www.weeklytimesnow.com.au/article/2011/04/06/316261\\_latest-news.html](http://www.weeklytimesnow.com.au/article/2011/04/06/316261_latest-news.html)

The Weekly Times has learned the architect of the [MDBA plan](#) has sought feedback from the basin state governments on curbing the clawback of water from irrigation communities, for the environment, to 2200-2400 gigalitres.

Basin state government sources said MDBA Basin Plan executive director Fraser MacLeod approached them asking if they were "comfortable with the lower numbers" as part of the draft plan due out in June-July.

The cutback would be a major backdown by the MDBA and its federal political masters on the 3000-4000 gigalitre boost for the environment, which the authority first proposed in its guide to the plan released October last year.

But state governments had been unable to get any detail from Dr MacLeod or his colleagues on the science and modelling used to derive the lower volume.

Dr MacLeod denied mentioning a range of volumes to state government officials.

State government bureaucrats said they had grown uneasy about the MDBA's drafting of the plan, which they said seemed to be driven by the Federal Government's desire for a quick political fix.

The bureaucrats said the MDBA and the Federal Government appeared to have walked away from amending the Water Act (2007), improving the science behind the plan and delivering certainty to basin communities and the environment.

When asked what involvement the states had in the development of the draft plan, one bureaucrat said they were: "not involved at all" and the MDBA was simply feeding them a range volumes from 2200-2400 gigalitres.

The state bureaucrats said they had not been given any detail on modelling or revised sustainable diversion limits.

Yet last December, Federal Water Minister Tony Burke chaired an MDBA ministerial council meeting that agreed: "to support a new process for the basin plan going forward that will more fully involve state governments and basin communities".

[Victorian Farmers Federation Water Council](#) chairman Richard Anderson said drafting the basin plan was not simply about a volume, but about ensuring the process delivered certainty.

"It's obvious Tony Burke and (MDBA chairman Craig) Knowles want the plan in place before the next election," Mr Anderson said.

"But if the process is flawed, we'll just end up back where we started once the Greens challenge the plan in court."

Green groups have warned they will take legal action if the Federal Government fails to apply the Water Act and science to the plan.

But Victorian Water Minister Peter Walsh said the Act could always be amended.

"My view is that we need to have a basin plan that fits what's needed for the community and environment," Mr Walsh said.

"If the Act is an impediment, then it should be changed."

Mr Walsh confirmed the Victorian Government had received no detail from the MDBA on draft sustainable diversion limits or modelling.

But he said Mr Knowles had reassured him details would be presented and discussed with the states before the draft was finalised