

# Report on how local communities influenced Basin Plan implementation – South Australia

South Australia's annual report on using local knowledge and solutions to implement the Basin Plan (Schedule 12, Item 6)

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## Reporting context

The success of the Basin Plan and associated water reforms depends on working closely with communities and stakeholders who can provide the necessary local knowledge and solutions to effectively implement the Plan.

The Basin Plan requires Basin States, the Authority and the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder to draw on local knowledge and solutions across a range of Basin Plan activities including long-term watering plans, annual environmental watering priorities and water resource plans.

It also requires that the best available knowledge (including scientific, local and cultural knowledge), evidence and analysis be used where practicable to ensure credibility, transparency and usefulness of monitoring and evaluation findings.

The purpose of this report is to monitor the extent to which local knowledge and solutions have influenced implementation of the Basin Plan during 2013-14. The report is a requirement of Chapter 13 of the Basin Plan and relates to Item 6 of Schedule 12.

## Indicators for measuring success

The use of local knowledge to inform Basin Plan implementation is evaluated using the following indicators:

- Processes used to identify stakeholders from local communities, peak bodies and individuals (**Indicator 6.1**)
  - How stakeholders were engaged (**Indicator 6.2**)
  - How engagement influenced Basin Plan implementation (**Indicator 6.3**)
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**Indicator 6.1:** Processes used to identify stakeholders from local communities, peak bodies and individuals

### Response

The Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources (DEWNR) has ongoing connections with multiple stakeholder groups formed over many years of engaging with our communities.

To fulfil Basin Plan requirements for the 2013-14 year, DEWNR implemented its processes to identify stakeholders for consultation on development of the Annual Environmental Watering Priorities for the River Murray Region.

To determine who should be consulted regarding environmental watering priorities, key stakeholder groups that had previously been consulted were

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identified. To determine the extent a group could contribute to the consultation process and whether the community would then be adequately represented by a varied cross-section of stakeholders, the membership and the means of deciding membership (i.e. statutory and/or terms of reference) were considered. DEWNR determined that groups that had previously been consulted regarding use of environmental water met this criteria and had provided critical input in preceding years.

DEWNR also assessed whether additional groups needed to be added to the list. As a raising was proposed for the Lock 1 and Lock 2 weir pools in 2013-14, mapping and the property cadastre were used to identify landholders that would potentially be affected by the raising of the Lock 1 and 2 weir pools, for inclusion in consultations.

The groups included in the consultation cover a diverse range of the community and this provided the best available local knowledge and solutions to maximise environmental watering outcomes. All DEWNR employees engaged in the River Murray environmental water sphere as well as other government agencies working on River Murray issues, such as the Environment Protection Authority and Primary Industries and Resources SA, had the opportunity for input. Other scientific experts from South Australian universities and research organisations who have extensive knowledge and understanding of the River Murray were also consulted and assisted with decisions regarding potential trade-offs between events and/or outcomes.

Stakeholders groups include the South Australian Murray Darling Basin Natural Resources Management Board (SAMDBNRMB) and the River Murray Advisory Committee (RMAC) (which have members that include a number of irrigators, local government council members and environmental and recreational interest groups), Local Action Planning groups through the Community Action for the Rural Environment Committee and Nature Foundation SA.

There was extensive ongoing consultation with Indigenous groups who live and work along the river. These include the First Peoples of the River Murray and Mallee Region for the Riverland Region as the Native Title Holders and the Ngarrindjeri Regional Authority for the Lower Lakes, Coorong and Murray Mouth (LLCMM), and the Mannum Aboriginal Community Association Incorporated.

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### Indicator 6.2: How stakeholders were engaged

## Response

### River Murray Region

To meet the needs of different stakeholders DEWNR facilitated a range of engagement opportunities. Stakeholders were contacted and agreement was reached on how engagement would occur.

Meetings were convened to present information on the annual environmental water planning and development of annual environmental watering priorities, including options for delivery of environmental water under different flow scenarios. Meetings were arranged with plenty of advance notice and fact sheets

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were distributed ahead of presentations. This meant that participants could ask questions and provide input and comment on all of the options and proposals.

Written feedback was sought on draft priorities as well as suggestions as to how to improve consultation and how the group in question preferred to be consulted. As a result, some groups are regularly engaged throughout the year, other groups such as the SA Murray-Darling Basin Natural Resources Management Board (SAMDBNRMB) advised that they prefer to be consulted near the end of the process when the draft priorities have been established following consultation.

In January 2013, regional departmental staff of DEWNR sought input on appropriate Riverland sites for environmental water from Local Action Planning (LAP) officers and committees. They also worked with the First Peoples of the Murray and Mallee Region regarding indigenous priorities. DEWNR staff consulted the Chowilla Coordinating Committee and the Chowilla Community Committee regarding wetlands within the Chowilla Floodplain. DEWNR staff consulted with the Community Advisory Panel (CAP), the Scientific Advisory Group (SAG) for the LLCMM and the Ngarrindjeri Regional Authority (through the Kungan Ngarrindjeri Yunnan Agreement (KNYA) Taskforce and Yarlular Ruwe Committee regarding the provision of environmental water for the LLCMM.

Ideas gathered during consultation were taken to a workshop coordinated by DEWNR to begin discussions on annual environmental water planning and annual environmental watering priorities for the South Australian River Murray for 2013-14. Key government stakeholders, environmental water holders and local scientific experts were invited to attend. Environmental water managers were then tasked with developing formal environmental watering proposals using a customised template based on a similar format used for The Living Murray program. A list of draft annual environmental watering priorities was prepared by DEWNR and input and feedback was then sought from additional community groups and peak bodies including the River Murray Advisory Committee (RMAC), the River Murray Operations Working Group (RMOWG), the Environmental Water Coordination Forum and the Environmental Flows Reference Group.

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### Indicator 6.3: How engagement influenced Basin Plan implementation

## Response

## Response

### River Murray Region

Local knowledge provided through feedback from stakeholders was used by DEWNR to determine environmental watering priorities. Regular attendance by DEWNR staff at community meetings facilitated the formation and strengthening of good stakeholder relationships, ensuring ongoing engagement.

Monitoring data and on-ground knowledge provided by the Local Action Planning Committees were used to determine appropriate sites for environmental watering.

The SAMDBNRMB responded well to the DEWNR information sheets and the presentation on annual environmental watering priorities. The members advised DEWNR to use RMAC for consultation on the priorities and annual plan in future and to provide the Board members with the final product. RMAC suggested some wetland sites for environmental watering and these were referred to DEWNR regional staff.

The CAP regularly provides advice on environmental watering for LLCMM particularly regarding barrage outflows and minimising reverse head events. In 2013-14 advice was received from the CAP on the impact of spring/summer environmental flows on waterbirds, invertebrates and estuarine fish in the Coorong. The CAP suggested the concept of delivering either a short or long spring/summer pulse with the decision for a short pulse to only be made if there was strong evidence of *Ruppia* flowering and sufficient environmental water and favourable wind and tide conditions. If this trigger was not met, CAP suggested saving water and delivering it for a longer period into summer for waterbird and estuarine fish outcomes. Following this advice from the CAP, SA Water and DEWNR tried to minimise the influx of salt water to the lakes to ensure reasonable water quality for local users.

The CAP and SAG members provided observational evidence of bird breeding and *Ruppia* re-generation. The SAG also provided advice on potential ecological outcomes, timing of delivery of environmental water to maximise outcomes for the Coorong and trade-offs for the region. The RMOWG discussed the environmental watering proposals and advised on the ability to meet operational requirements and environmental watering needs under the different flow scenarios. The advice provided was used to inform the management of environmental water flows.

### Case study

The Environmental Flows Reference Group has provided continuous advice during the delivery of environmental water regarding extending flow peaks to maximise golden and silver perch breeding opportunities in the River Murray channel in spring. This advice was taken to the CEWH and MDBA and utilised for the 2013 spring pulse. The group also proposed moving a return flow peak to an earlier delivery time to fill a low flow period in the SA hydrograph to keep Coorong water levels up to facilitate the keystone *Ruppia* plant completing its reproductive cycle. Based on the proposal, the timing of a return flow peak was changed.