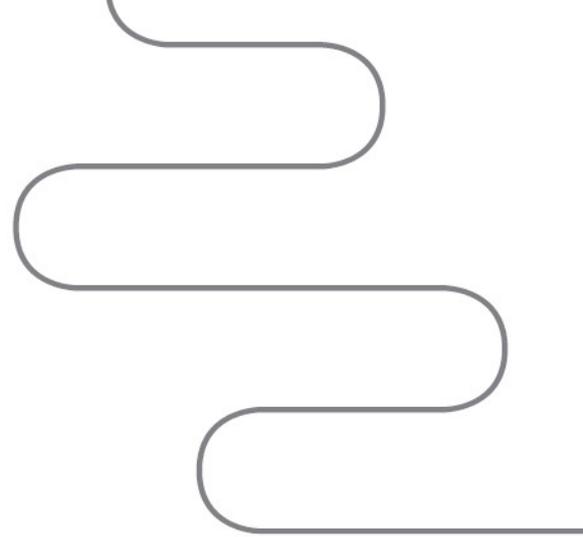


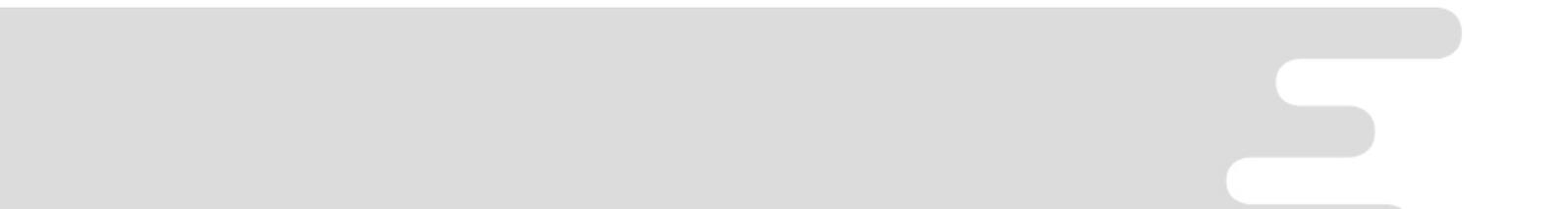


Australian Government



How local communities influenced Basin Plan implementation

26 November 2015



Background

Working effectively with communities is important to ensure the success of the Basin Plan.

The MDBA, Basin governments and the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder (CEWH) are committed to seeking local knowledge and solutions through a range of Basin Plan activities. These include long-term watering plans, annual environmental watering priorities and water resource plans.

The Basin Plan promotes the use of best available knowledge (including local, scientific and cultural knowledge), evidence and analysis, to ensure that monitoring and evaluation findings are transparent and useful.

Basin governments and the CEWH report each year on "the extent to which local knowledge and solutions inform implementation of the Basin Plan" (Schedule 12, Item 6). This reporting identifies the outcomes of engagement activities and how governments have involved a broad range of community members.

The MDBA has summarised how Basin governments identified and involved stakeholders, and implementation outcomes in 2013-14. The full reports are available at the bottom of this page.

Indicators for measuring success

There are three indicators which Basin governments used for measuring the effectiveness of community engagement in Basin Plan activities.

- [Processes used to identify stakeholders from local communities and peak bodies to individuals](#)
- [How stakeholders were engaged](#)
- [How engagement influenced Basin Plan implementation](#)

Processes used to identify stakeholders from local communities peak bodies and individuals

Basin jurisdictions continue to build on stakeholder networks which were established during or before Basin Plan development. In some cases, this included continuing advisory bodies such as the Queensland Murray-Darling Basin Strategic Consultative Committee, which includes representatives from various industry and sector peak bodies.

Jurisdictions undertook stakeholder mapping and other targeted activities to ensure they could draw on local knowledge from a broad range of local interests. This included using the connections and expertise of the:

- Northern Basin Advisory Committee (NBAC) which considers regional views and provides advice to the Authority on Basin Plan matters covering the entire Basin upstream of Menindee Lakes, and

- Basin Community Committee (BCC) which engages with communities across the Basin on Basin Plan implementation.

Basin governments consulted established stakeholder groups about environmental watering. NSW uses Environmental Water Advisory Groups (EWAG), which provide a unique forum to draw on expert knowledge, including local knowledge and experience, in order to contribute to planning environmental watering under the Basin Plan. The EWAGs are central to developing annual watering priorities and will play a pivotal role in the development of long-term watering plans in addition to consultation with the broader community.

Victoria's catchment management authorities (CMAs) have an established network of stakeholders from local communities and peak bodies, which the Victorian Government draws on. Some Victorian CMAs have EWAGs to provide advice.

The Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder (CEWH) with the support of the Commonwealth Environmental Water Office (CEWO) sought local input by using existing Basin state, regional and local networks, together with open engagement techniques such as social media, which invites stakeholder feedback.

The CEWO maintains a stakeholder engagement and feedback register to keep track of stakeholder engagement and interest. The CEWO commenced recruitment for local engagement officers, who will begin working with Basin communities in the next reporting year.

The MDBA has specialist engagement staff to map and manage stakeholder relationships and support program areas in their local engagement activities.

How stakeholders were engaged

A mix of approaches was used to involve communities, peak groups and other stakeholders. This included targeted meetings, open public meetings, formal submissions, presentations and online engagement.

All agencies recognised the need to engage early and at all stages of development on key pieces of work. For example, before the [Constraints Management Strategy \(CMS\)](#) was developed, the MDBA assigned a project leader to each key constraint area. Each project leader worked through the year with riparian landholders, councils, regional state natural resource management (NRM) organisations, water delivery authorities and industry groups to get their input. The MDBA tailored engagement methods to the needs of particular stakeholders. Face-to-face contact was the preferred method to establish and build relationships.

Victoria undertook extensive consultation in the Goulburn-Broken catchment to inform local communities about the emerging CMS and to seek local knowledge and input to inform its final content.

Three community-based working groups were established in the catchment, supported by the MDBA and the [Goulburn-Broken Catchment Management Authority](#). These working groups have continued to operate as an informed consultation forum to assist the MDBA in its work during

2014, including preparing its 2014 CMS Annual Report to the [Murray–Darling Basin Ministerial Council](#).

Agencies took account of local cultural knowledge as well as Indigenous values and uses of the Basin's water resources through different activities. For example, the MDBA supported the [Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations' \(MLDRIN\)](#) and the [Northern Basin Aboriginal Nations \(NBAN\)](#) to participate in Murray–Darling Basin planning and programs and sought their advice on specific matters.

Queensland and the CEWH also sought advice from NBAN and MLDRIN respectively on specific issues and on involving Indigenous communities in the Basin.

Other jurisdictions built relationships and worked with Indigenous communities in their respective regions. For example, South Australia consulted Indigenous groups who live and work along the river during development of the Annual Environmental Watering Priorities for the River Murray Region. The groups involved included: the First Peoples of the River Murray and Mallee Region for the Riverland Region, as the Native Title Holders; the Ngarrindjeri Regional Authority for the Lower Lakes, Coorong and Murray Mouth (LLCMM); and the Mannum Aboriginal Community Association Incorporated.

The outcome of engagement on the implementation of the Basin Plan

Involving local people and groups across the Basin has allowed local knowledge to shape key pieces of work and to influence decision making. Examples below illustrate some of the ways this occurred in 2013-14.

ACT

The ACT Government involved a range of stakeholders in developing its Water Resource Plan. This included a mix of government, Indigenous and rural landholder representatives and catchment management groups. The scientific community contributed to the risk assessment and local catchment groups provided considerable input on water quality in urban lakes and ponds, in particular those bodies of water that eventually flow into the Murrumbidgee River.

SA

The Environmental Flows Reference Group provided continuous advice during the delivery of environmental water about extending flow peaks to maximise opportunities for golden perch and silver perch to breed in the River Murray channel in spring. This advice was taken to the CEWH and the MDBA and used for the 2013 spring pulse.

The group also proposed moving a return flow peak to an earlier delivery time to keep Coorong water levels up so that a *Ruppia* plant community could complete its reproductive cycle. *Ruppia* is an important food source for migratory shorebirds and provides habitat for fish and macroinvertebrates in the Coorong. Based on the proposal, the timing of a return flow peak was changed.

The MDBA, NSW and CEWH

Knowledge gained from the Lachlan Riverine Working Group (LRWG) in NSW informed the 2013-14 annual environmental watering priority, *improve ecosystem resilience amongst wetland vegetation communities in the lower Lachlan wetland*. The group represents landholders, NSW Government agencies, the Inland Rivers Network and Lachlan Valley Water Users. The group's work resulted in the largest environmental watering of the Lachlan with almost 89 GL (74 GL of Commonwealth water and 15 GL of NSW water) provided. Communities observed early positive environmental responses, with the endangered southern bell frog recorded in the Lachlan for only the second time since the 1970s. Flows continued running into the Great Cumbung Swamp until late August 2013.

Qld

NBAC provided extensive advice that Queensland, NSW and the MDBA took on board in developing nine projects that make up the Northern Basin work plan which feeds into the 2015 Northern Basin review. A new lower Balonne advisory group was formed under the auspices of MDBA to provide local advice about projects being implemented in the Lower Balonne system, particularly the environmental science projects, as part of the Northern Basin Work Program.

Vic

Feedback and ideas provided through the engagement of Victorian communities formed the basis of CMA seasonal watering proposals. These proposals inform the Victorian Environmental Water Holder's seasonal watering plan, which sets the priorities for where, when, how and why environmental water will be used annually.