



Basin Community Committee

Bringing a community perspective to the Murray–Darling Basin

COMMUNIQUE

July 2024

The Basin Community Committee (the Committee) met on 18 June 2024 in Albury on the lands of the Wiradjuri people.

The Committee spent an hour meeting with the 6-member Authority. Air Chief Marshal Sir Angus Houston AK, AFC (Ret'd), Authority Chair, welcomed the Committee and spoke about building on the significant goodwill that was demonstrated by all parties during the Basin Water Leadership Summit held in Sydney in April this year. Committee members deliberated over how they might best relay community insights to key decision-makers whilst also avoiding potential political influence in the development of sound policies. Empowering communities to contribute measures leading to a healthy Basin was also discussed.

Members discussed recent engagements with the Department of Climate Change, Energy, Environment and Water, expressing a desire for greater involvement as an advisory body. In preparation for meetings with the Basin Officials Council and the Murray–Darling Basin Ministerial Council, members identified the key issues and messages they wished to highlight, as outlined in the attached Statement of Advice.

The Committee received a presentation on the *Basin Plan Review Early Insights Paper*, which was launched the following day at the River Reflections Conference. Grace Mang, General Manager, Basin Plan Review Strategy and Integration, provided an overview of the paper and highlighted the 5 areas of challenge under issues and opportunities:

- assessing environmental outcomes using multiple lines of evidence
- climate change and preparing for our future by enhancing adaptation through the Basin Plan
- moving Beyond “Just Add Water” to encourage holistic land and water management
- flexibility and improvement in management of the Northern Basin
- building on, and simplifying the Basin Plan.

A Constraints Relaxation Implementation Roadmap (the Roadmap) presentation was provided to the Committee. The Roadmap will identify a pathway to better progress state government projects to relax constraints in the use of water for the environment. A requirement of the *Water Amendment (Restoring Our Rivers) Act 2023*, the Roadmap is being developed by the MDBA in consultation with the Commonwealth and state governments and the public, and must be published by 31 December 2024.

The Committee will next meet online on 14 August 2024.

BACKGROUND

Members of the Committee are appointed by the 6-member Authority after an extensive selection process involving all Basin governments. They reflect the diverse perspectives of towns and communities across the Basin, as well as the diversity of experiences around water reform.

The Basin Community Committee is an independent advisory committee to the Murray–Darling Basin Authority and the Murray–Darling Basin Ministerial Council. Established under the *Water Act 2007*, the Committee ensures the voices of diverse communities in the Basin are heard.

For more information on the Basin Community Committee

 www.mdba.gov.au/BCC  1800 630 114



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Contact your local Basin Community Committee member via engagement@mdba.gov.au to share your views on how the Basin Plan is being implemented.

See a full list of members and map of their locations at www.mdba.gov.au/BCC

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BASIN COMMUNITY COMMITTEE’S STATEMENT OF ADVICE TO THE MURRAY–DARLING BASIN MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

The BCC is thankful for the opportunity to provide advice to the Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council at their most recent meeting held on 28 July 2024 via videoconference.

In particular, the BCC’s advice focused on two key matters, being the Sustainable Communities Program and the ongoing Murray-Darling Basin Plan implementation.

Please see below the BCC’s statement of advice delivered to the Ministerial Council meeting:

The Sustainable Communities program.

The BCC’s advice is that the \$300M announced is not sufficient and will not likely meet the structural adjustment needs of communities.

Furthermore, to be effective, this funding must directly mitigate the impacts of water recovery. Overarching guiding principles are needed to ensure a focus on providing jobs, preventing population decline, and providing ongoing economic activity.

In addition, a cross-portfolio approach is needed. Many of the solutions for communities and industry lie outside of the water and regional development portfolios, for example, in trade, agricultural R&D, education, and health. We also encourage Governments to consider how to support the ongoing delivery of the critical services that communities need to thrive.

Finally, a key learning from the Water Leaders’ Summit is that the process is just as important as the outcome. Governments must deliver this program with communities, not too communities. Communities should be assisted to scope out their own projects and, if required, allowed the time needed to sit and find their own solutions.

Basin Plan implementation.

For both the SDLAM projects and the 450 GL Projects - the community is calling for clear pathways to bring forward new projects.

We understand that a number of potentially very good projects have not been able to progress due to the criteria being too restrictive. Hence, we encourage you to widen the gateway to allow more projects through.

We also feel that to be successful in delivering the volumes required, there needs to be a much greater focus on smaller projects. The BCC is aware of many great projects that deliver improved environmental outcomes and, in many cases, great outcomes for First Nations people, and that these are not getting picked up.

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Finally, for buy-backs, we seek your renewed commitment to a more strategic approach to water purchase, to mitigate impacts. We also urge you to be transparent with communities about your actions and the progress made.

In closing, I want to highlight a good news story being the recent Basin Leadership Summit. The BCC was blown away by the significant goodwill and common ground found between the diverse stakeholders in attendance. In particular, there was clear consensus that a more wholistic approach is required for managing Basin health. This and others matter where there was consensus should be a focus for the Basin Governments moving forward.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide our advice and I welcome any questions either today or at a later time.

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