



Basin Community Committee

Bringing a community perspective to the Murray–Darling Basin

COMMUNIQUE

29 November 2023

The Basin Community Committee (the Committee) met on 28 and 29 November 2023, which was preceded by a meeting of the Indigenous Water Sub-Committee on 27 November 2023. Both meetings were held on Ngannawal Country in Canberra.

On the morning of 28 November, the Committee travelled to Parliament House to meet with the Minister for the Environment and Water, the Hon Tanya Plibersek MP. The conversation was constructive and focused on the importance of community and First Nations engagement on Basin Plan implementation.

Members participated in an open discussion with the Minister surrounding implementing the *Water Amendment (Restoring Our Rivers) Bill 2023* (the Bill), recognising it will introduce a range of tools that may be used to achieve the additional 450 GL of water for the environment. The Committee conveyed the considerable uncertainty in the community around future implementation, particularly further water recovery, and what this will mean for them.

The Committee emphasised to the Minister their ongoing commitment to encouraging partnerships between community and government to find place-based and regional solutions to progress Basin Plan implementation while minimising negative impacts. The Committee was pleased to receive a commitment from the Minister to continue ongoing engagement on Basin Plan implementation into the future.

A presentation from Ms Lyn O’Connell, Deputy Secretary Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water on key elements of the Bill was well received. This update highlighted the proposed amendments to acknowledge First Nations people’s connection to Basin waters. The Committee looks forward to ongoing engagement with the Department as programs to implement the Basin Plan are further designed.

The Committee received an update on the progress of the Basin Plan Evaluation work by the MDBA, and it looks forward to next year, where the Committee will provide input into the evidence base for the evaluation.

Members received an update from the Indigenous Water Subcommittee. The MDBA updated the Subcommittee on its on-Country consultations to understand the engagement preferences of Nations, and work underway to prepare a report that collates publicly available information that has previously been provided on the aspirations of First Nations people, progress towards these aspirations, and the contribution of the Basin Plan. This report will be tested with First Nations people and groups, and support input into the Basin Plan Evaluation and the 2026 Review.

First Nations members of the Committee led a discussion about programs focused on cultural flows plans, traditional fire burning and billabong restoration. Members reflected these are examples of the types of

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For more information on the Basin Community Committee

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projects that could benefit from the proposed boosting of funding by the Australian Government, alongside timely delivery of the Aboriginal Water Entitlements Program.

The Committee emphasised the importance of recognising Cultural Authority, nation-by-nation engagement, and the importance of engaging First Nations women, and younger First Nations people as our future leaders.

On 29 November, the Committee met with Murray–Darling Basin Authority members with Air Chief Marshal Sir Angus Houston AK AFC (Ret'd) providing opening remarks. He reflected on his recent listening tours and the many conversations he has held throughout the Basin, noting the common thread in them all being community.

The Committee and Authority discussed the importance of ongoing engagement with stakeholders and the community on both Basin Plan implementation and the Basin Plan review. The Committee advised communities will be very focused on what the Bill and Basin Plan amendments will mean for them in the coming months. They also noted that the Authority should consider ways of bringing stakeholders with different perspectives of the Basin together – to build stronger appreciation of people's values of the Basin and to identify areas of common ground.

The Committee and the Authority agreed the ongoing importance of meeting regularly as the Authority continues its preparations for the Basin Plan Review.

BACKGROUND

Members of the Committee are appointed by the Murray–Darling Basin 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.

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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