



Basin Community Committee

Bringing a community perspective to the Murray–Darling Basin

28 July 2023

The Hon. Minister Tanya Plibersek MP
Minister for the Environment and Water
PO Box 2676.
Strawberry Hills NSW 2012

Sir Angus Houston
Chair
Murray Darling Basin Authority
GPO Box 1801
Canberra City, ACT 2601

Dear The Hon. Tanya Plibersek MP and Air Chief Marshal Sir Angus Houston AK, AFC (Ret'd),

Open Letter from the Basin Community Committee to Minister Plibersek and the Murray Darling Basin Authority

The Basin Community Committee (BCC) thanks and commends the Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) for the frank advice provided to Minister Plibersek on Tuesday 25 July 2023. We feel this is a comprehensive reflection of the current state of play for the Basin Plan and accurately reflects what the BCC members have been hearing in their respective Basin communities.

Likewise, the BCC wishes to thank you Minister Plibersek for accepting the MDBA advice and welcomes your Government's response as outlined in your press conference held on the same day. The BCC appreciates that your Government is seeking to take a pragmatic approach to the remaining delivery of the Murray Darling Basin Plan.

The BCC strongly supports an extension to the timeframes for delivery of the Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment Mechanism (SDLAM) projects including the Supply, Constraints and Efficiency measures. At the same time, we also support your position in seeking a commitment from the States to, where feasible, deliver upon these projects.

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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The Supply and Constraints Measures are a very important component of the Basin Plan. They allow for additional environmental outcomes to be achieved, that would otherwise not be met under the current settings, while at the same time offsetting the need for water recovery. We are of the opinion that for many projects, the reasons for the delays are reasonable, and that it would be in the best interests of the Basin and its communities to allow the time for these projects to be completed in full. The Victorian Murray Floodplain Restoration Project is a very good example of one of these projects.

With respect to the Efficiency Measures, we have previously outlined our support for your Government's recent consultation program inviting the community to submit their ideas to deliver the balance of the 450 GL of water recovery. We encourage you to give due consideration to the various ideas provided and to work with communities when assessing these projects. The BCC is of the opinion that there are a number of excellent ideas that could be pursued with Basin Community support, including for example water recycling for the Basin's cities.

We also wish to reiterate our previous advice that a greater focus is required on First Nations cultural, environmental, self-determination, and social values. As you are aware, Traditional Custodians and their Nations have a deep and continued cultural, social, environmental, and economic connection to their lands and waters. There is a fantastic opportunity available to Basin Governments and the broader community to better recognise and incorporate Traditional Custodians knowledge and cultural values in the Basin Plan, including the SDLAM projects.

Whilst we support your continued commitment to reach the Basin Plan targets, the BCC emphasises that this should not be with an 'at all costs' mind set. The Basin Plan targets were developed based on the best science available and in good faith, but some of the targets may simply be unachievable. The Basin Plan Review will provide an ideal opportunity to ascertain whether this is the case and whether the existing target-based Basin Plan approach is the best approach to delivering on the Basin communities and wider Australian public's environmental, social, economic and cultural desires and needs.

We also encourage the current Government to continue to acknowledge the significant achievements of the Basin Plan to date. Over 2100 GL of water has been returned to the environment enabling the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder to achieve incredible

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outcomes for Basin health. While there are still areas that need significant attention, we nevertheless should be immensely proud of the progress made to date. The Basin Plan was always a bold reform agenda, and a majority of this agenda has been achieved. The Basin Plan remains world leading in its approach to managing inland river systems in a way that provides for environmental, cultural, economic and social outcomes.

Finally, the BCC maintains that a partnership approach between Basin communities and Basin Governments is key to the successful remaining implementation of the Basin Plan. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss with you further how we can foster this partnership approach to ensure everyone can feel invested in, and take ownership of, the most important environmental reform to have occurred in inland Australia.

Yours sincerely

Rachel Kelly
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Bcc.secretariat@mdba.gov.au

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