



Australian Government



Murray-Darling Basin 2019-20 Environmental watering priorities

Water for the environment maintains and improves the health of rivers, floodplains, and protects plants, animals and landscapes that rely on rivers. Healthy rivers support communities and agriculture.

Each year, the Murray-Darling Basin Authority sets the Basin **environmental watering priorities**. These focus on river flows and connectivity, native vegetation, waterbirds and native fish and are set out as rolling, multi-year priorities to guide environmental watering over the medium term (3-5 years).

Deciding what areas need water to maintain or restore species and ecosystems each year is determined by the expected conditions. **Conditions in the Basin are dry to very dry** and this is expected to continue in 2019-20.

Due to these conditions, the main focus this year is to avoid irreversible impacts on species, vegetation and important sites.

A very dry outlook means water availability is likely to be low, particularly in the northern Basin. More water is expected to be available in some southern catchments, where managers may be able to do more than manage for drought.

The Murray-Darling Basin Authority, the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder and Basin states are working together to achieve a healthy working Basin.

For more information visit:
mdba.gov.au/w4te-priorities

Connect with us.

The MDBA has offices in Adelaide, Albury-Wodonga, Canberra, Goondiwindi, Toowoomba, and regional engagement officers around the Basin.

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Rolling, multi-year priorities:



Support lateral and longitudinal connectivity along the river systems.



Support freshwater connectivity through the Lower Lakes, Coorong and Murray Mouth.



Maintain the extent, improve the condition and promote recruitment of forests and wetlands.



Maintain the extent, improve the condition of lignum shrublands.



Expand the extent and improve the condition of Moira grass in Barmah-Millewa Forest.



Expand the extent and improve resilience of *Ruppia tuberosa* (Ruppia) in the southern Coorong.



Improve the abundance and maintain the diversity of the Basin's waterbird population.



Maintain the abundance of key shorebird species in the Lower Lakes and Coorong.



Support Basin-scale population recovery of native fish by reinstating flows that promote key ecological processes across local, regional and system scales in the southern connected Basin.



Improve flow regimes and connectivity in northern Basin rivers to support native fish populations across local, regional and system scales.



Support viable populations of threatened native fish, maximise opportunities for range expansion and establish new populations.

Delivering water for the environment in 2019-20

Below are examples of guidance to achieve the Basin environmental watering priorities in 2019-20.

The guidance to achieve the priorities this year includes watering areas that have multiple ecological needs. For the full guidance, which includes other sites, visit mdba.gov.au/w4te-priorities

Basin-wide guidance for 2019-20



Protect and provide flows in the Barwon-Darling

- increase connection along the Barwon-Darling and lower Darling
- protect refuges and support native fish populations

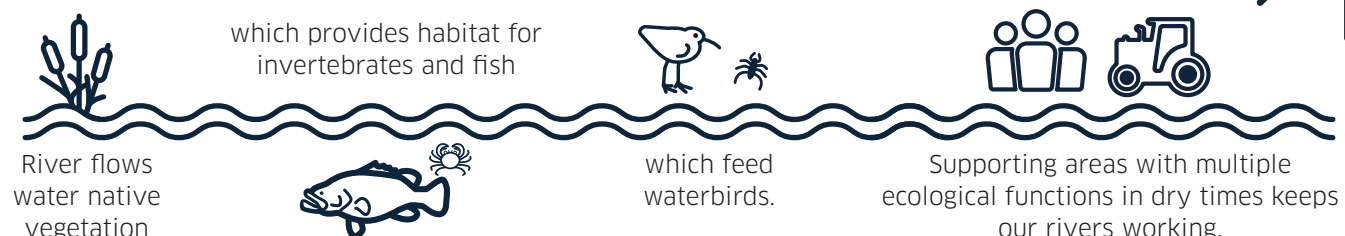
Support flows to the Narran Lakes

- maintain habitat at Narran Lakes
- so waterbirds can shelter and breed
- replenish refuge waterholes for native fish

Coordinate management of the Lower Lakes, Coorong and Murray Mouth

- support and build up populations of large-bodied native fish in the southern connected Basin
- supply flows to the Coorong and keep the Lower Lakes above 0.4m
- ensure spring flows reach *Ruppia tuberosa* – an important water plant
- maintain and improve habitat for waterbird breeding and maximise food for shorebirds
- maintain and improve habitat for threatened native fish

Ecological function is how river flows drive important processes and relationships between native vegetation, fish and waterbirds, which keep our rivers healthy.



Coordinate watering to increase connectivity along rivers

Avoid irreversible environmental impacts of extended drought

Provide flows to prevent refuges drying out

Provide flows to core wetland areas and refuge habitat

Improve vegetation condition in high priority areas

Provide flows to waterbird breeding sites that birds are using this year

Maximise food for shorebirds

Support and build up populations of large-bodied native fish in the southern connected Basin

Protect critical fish populations and their habitats and improve river connectivity in the northern Basin

Maintain and build up existing threatened native fish populations

Provide flows to the Koondrook-Perricoota Forest

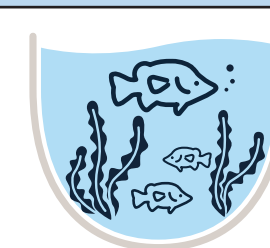
- to water critical understorey vegetation
- so waterbirds can shelter and breed
- to improve habitat for specialist fish in the forest
- use infrastructure to ensure flows reach the floodplain-wetland ecosystem of the forest

Waterbirds flock to breeding sites with the most food and best shelter. Watering where the birds are ensures they have enough food to breed and journey across the globe.

Fish, birds, insects and plants all contribute to healthy working rivers. Ensuring everyone gets their fair share of water keeps our rivers working.

Plants improve water quality and provide shelter, food and shade for waterbirds and animals.

Refuges are permanent waterholes that hold water even when the rest of the river or wetland is dry. Fish and the food they eat need refuges to survive dry times. Refuges need to be flushed and refilled with fresh water regularly so fish can survive.



Water for the environment

What makes a river healthy?

A connected river is a healthy river. Connected rivers help native fish, waterbirds and plants thrive and provide good water quality for communities, the environment, tourism and agriculture.

The bigger plan

The annual priorities are needed to achieve the long-term plan to restore and protect the Murray-Darling Basin's rivers. Improving river health takes time. The priorities will take a number of years to achieve.

Visit the Basin-wide environmental watering strategy on mdba.gov.au/bws for the full story.

Who delivers water for the environment?

The Murray-Darling Basin Authority provides environmental water holders with guidance to plan to release water for the environment across the Basin. The Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder and Basin state governments deliver water for the environment depending on local, regional and cultural needs and climatic conditions.

Watering in 2019–20

The sites and stretches of river highlighted on the map are examples of sites with multiple ecological needs that would benefit from watering this year. For the full guidance, visit mdba.gov.au/w4te-priorities

