

The MD-WERP Newsletter

April 2022

Message from the Chair

The Murray-Darling Water & Environment Research Program is going from strength to strength. I am thankful to the many people who have helped it progress from the planning stages to implementation.

I am pleased to report the governance of the program has benefited from the development of a monitoring and evaluation framework. This provides us with a rigorous method to examine performance and to introduce ongoing improvements to the program. The Governing Panel has made a commitment to enhance the public visibility of the program, including how it is governed and how it is delivering value. The [MD-WERP web presence](#) has recently been given an uplift to provide a clearer view of the program and I encourage you to keep an eye on this. Our latest [Annual Progress Report](#) is another useful resource for keeping our stakeholders informed.

The Governing Panel has recently endorsed 3 more tactical research projects focused on key issues facing the Basin and its communities. The 3 new projects deal with foraging habitat requirements of wetlands, blue-green algal blooms and riverbank erosion. Tactical research projects are designed to yield insights and practical outcomes quickly, so our teams should be reporting on the outcomes of this work later this year.

We have received status reports on the full suite of strategic research projects in flight and it is pleasing to note that activities are on track. I'm looking forward to seeing further progress across all projects and am keenly anticipating the public release of the program's first deliverables over the coming months.

Prof Rob Vertessy
Chair, MD-WERP Governing Panel

Welcome to our second e-newsletter and an update on what's been a strong start to 2022.

In the last newsletter we shared our achievements in establishing program governance and administration. This time we'd like to introduce you to the 4 research themes and give an overview of what is involved in each.

The program is well into its implementation phase. This year we've seen meetings of all groups involved in the program, presentations and workshops with end-users, and research commence for most of the research questions. All 3 investment streams (strategic, tactical and communication &

engagement) are progressing well under the guidance of the Governing Panel and other leadership groups.

Strategic investment

The MD–WERP Research Consortium (lead by CSIRO and La Trobe University) have been driving the co-design and research for the strategic research themes. Since December a number of research deliverables have been submitted to the Project Implementation Team. These deliverables are going through an administrative and endorsement process before they will then be publicly released.

Find out more about each theme by clicking the link below:

[Theme 1: Climate Adaptation](#)

[Theme 2: Hydrology](#)

[Theme 3: Environmental Outcomes](#)

[Theme 4: Social, Economic and Cultural Outcomes](#)

A culture of strong relationships and cooperation is being developed between end users and researchers and this is essential to helping ensure that program investments deliver impact. End User Advisory Groups (EUAG) are important in working to align research outcomes with the needs of policy makers and governments, increasing the likelihood of research adoption. Open communication between all parties also helps reduce duplication of research – important in this tight fiscal environment.

Themes 1, 2 and 3 have each held EUAG meetings with good engagement between the researchers and Commonwealth and State policy advisers. Theme 4 has recently reviewed its EUAG and the group is transitioning to a Social, Economic and Cultural Community of Practice (CoP). The CoP will continue to provide advice for Theme 4 but will also advise on other government priorities. Current Theme 4 EUAG members will be core of the CoP, with additional members to be invited.

Tactical investment

Tactical projects are short-term outputs, responsive to the needs of decision and policy makers on water management, river operations, and Basin Plan implementation.

The Governing Panel has endorsed a further 3 tactical projects that meet a current Australian Government need. These projects are:

- Understanding foraging habitat requirements at major wetland ecosystems and its relationship to adjacent breeding habitat, including consideration of likely climate.
- Synthesis of the scientific knowledge on the influences on erosion within the different reaches of the River Murray.
- Synthesis of the latest science on blue-green algae (BGA) and an assessment of whether algal blooms are becoming more frequent or severe.

More information can be read about the tactical projects here:

<https://getinvolved.mdba.gov.au/md-werp-tactical>

Communication, engagement and synthesis

Many people have a growing interest in the Australian Government's investment in science, including MD-WERP. To help meet this need, the Program Implementation Team has been giving presentations to key stakeholder groups. Feedback on the program, its themes and projects has been generally positive and constructive.

If you or someone you know would be interested in a briefing, please email us at mdwerp@mdba.gov.au.

We are committed to being open and transparent as the program continues and will continue to publish information and updates about the program and the progress of each theme.

Continual improvement

Now that we are in the implementation phase, it is important to monitor and report on how the program is progressing. To help us achieve this, the Governing Panel has endorsed a Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Improvement (MERI) Framework.

The MERI approach will use 4 key evaluation criteria to help us evaluate the program:

- **Impact** - Are we improving our water policy, capacity to manage risks and river operations/ water management outcomes?
- **Efficiency** – Are we delivering the program and projects efficiently?
- **Effectiveness** – Are the activities and outputs delivering the intended short-term outcomes?
- **Appropriateness** – Are the activities and outputs being delivered as planned?

The outputs of the MERI will be used to support program governance, ensure continuous improvement of the program and to demonstrate the benefits of the program.

Coming together

And finally, planning is underway to bring together the full Research Consortium to present progress to date, look for synergies across the 4 themes, find stronger links between science and policy, and do research planning for the next financial year. Likely to be held in June, this will be the first time we'll have the opportunity for a full cross-theme, research focussed conversation. We are looking forward to seeing everyone come together.

Please follow the links to read more about the research on [GetInvolved](#), and feel free to share this newsletter with your colleagues.

To close I'd like to say that since Jacqui Hickey's departure, I have enjoyed taking over the role of the Project Delegate and being more involved in this great program.

Matt Coleman
MD-WERP Project Delegate