



Australian Government

Department of Climate Change, Energy,
the Environment and Water

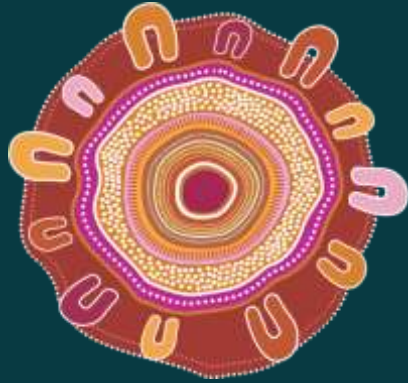
River Reflections Conference 2024

Implementing the
Murray–Darling Basin
Plan

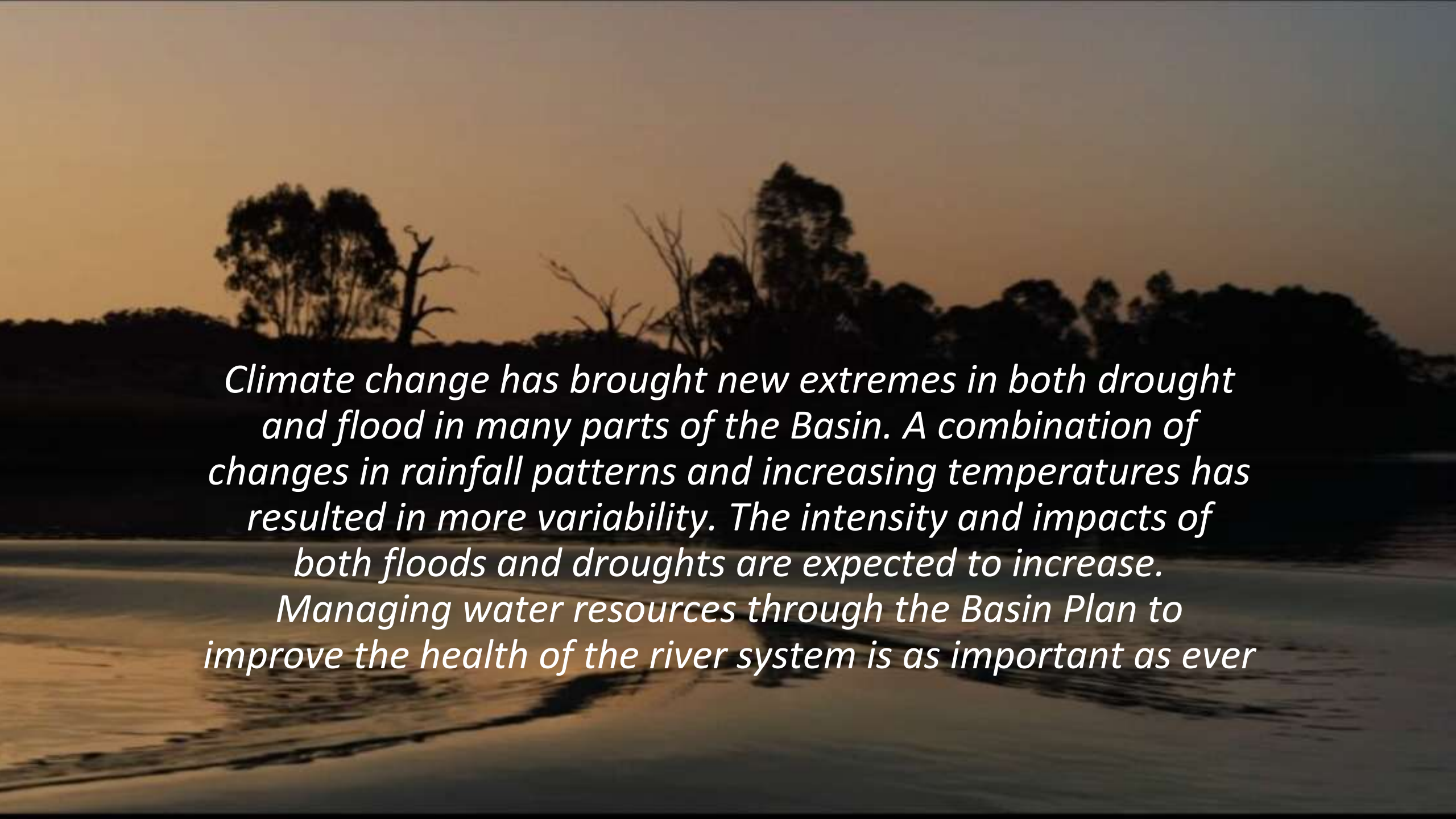
Rachel Connell

19 June 2024





We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and culture. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present.



Climate change has brought new extremes in both drought and flood in many parts of the Basin. A combination of changes in rainfall patterns and increasing temperatures has resulted in more variability. The intensity and impacts of both floods and droughts are expected to increase. Managing water resources through the Basin Plan to improve the health of the river system is as important as ever

Murray-Darling Basin



provide drinking water
for more than 3 million
Australians



supply water to make farmland more
productive – an important sector that
generates more than \$8.5 billion to the
Australian economy every year



bring tourism to the
Murray-Darling Basin,
contributing \$15 billion
to the region

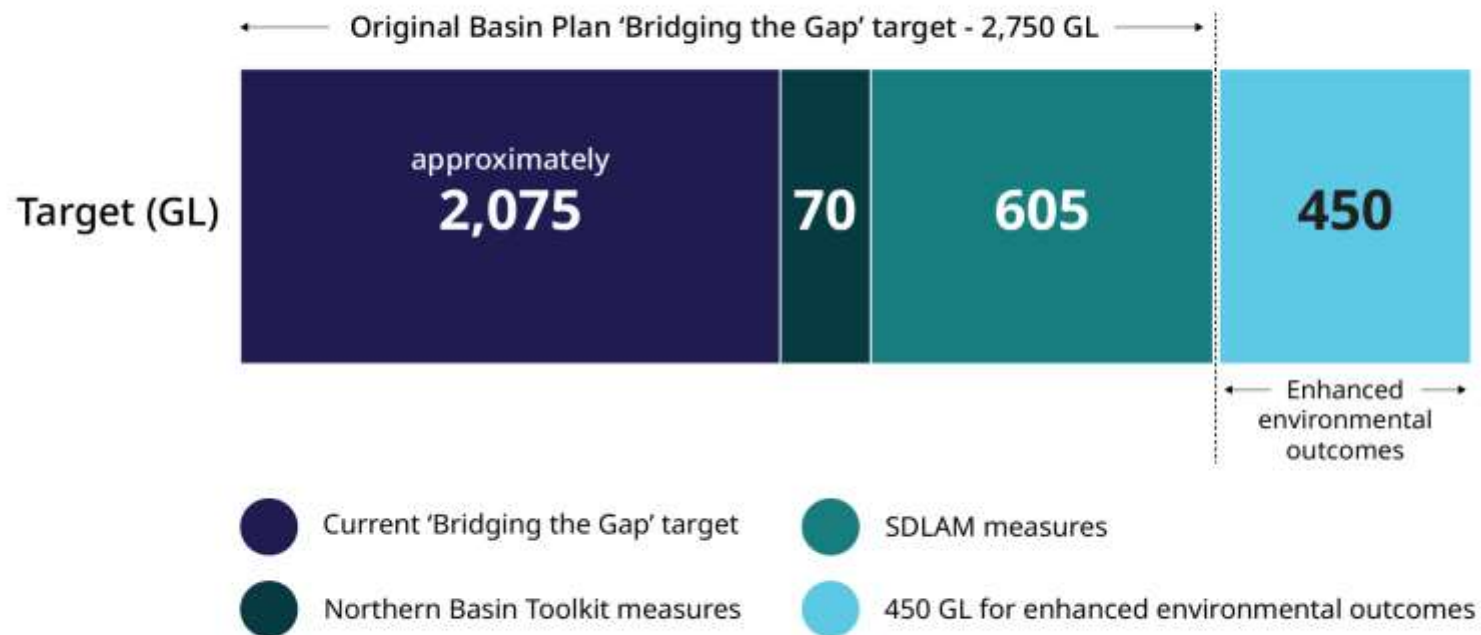


are home to many unique and iconic animals
including more than 50 endangered species,
120 different species of waterbirds, and 50
native fish species.

Taking water from our rivers and storing it in dams has dramatically changed how much water flows through the rivers of the Murray-Darling Basin.

More than 2180 GL of water has been recovered

The Murray–Darling Basin Plan: a 3200 gigalitre (GL) plan



Taking stock

The Australian Government investment to date:

More than **\$3.7 billion** spent/ committed for infrastructure to recover nearly **700 GL**.

More than **\$3 billion** spent/ publicly committed to purchase nearly **1300 GL**.

More than **\$1.5 billion** spent/ committed for SDLAM projects

More than **\$3.2 billion** for other Basin initiatives, including more than **\$1 billion** in environmental projects and other complementary measures.

There is still more to do :

26 GL to bridge the current gap

422.5 GL to the 450 GL to enhance environmental outcomes.

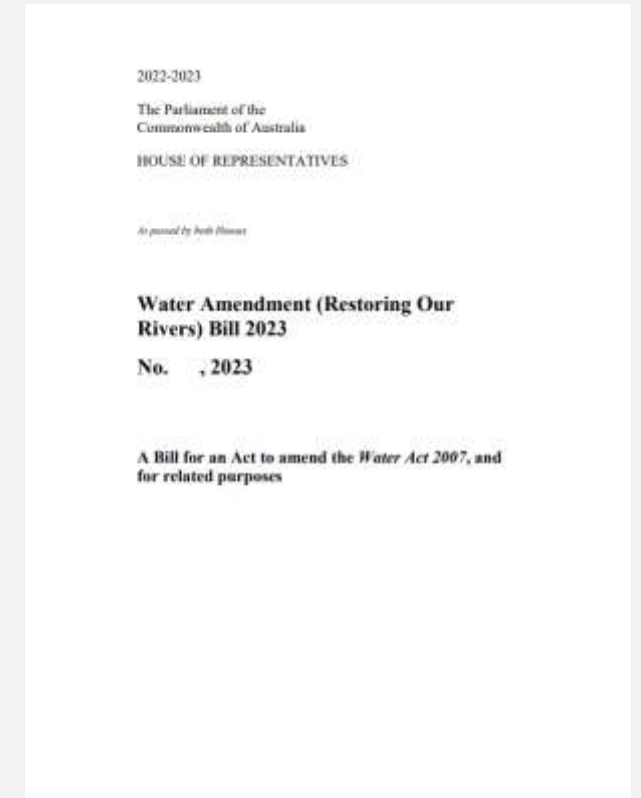
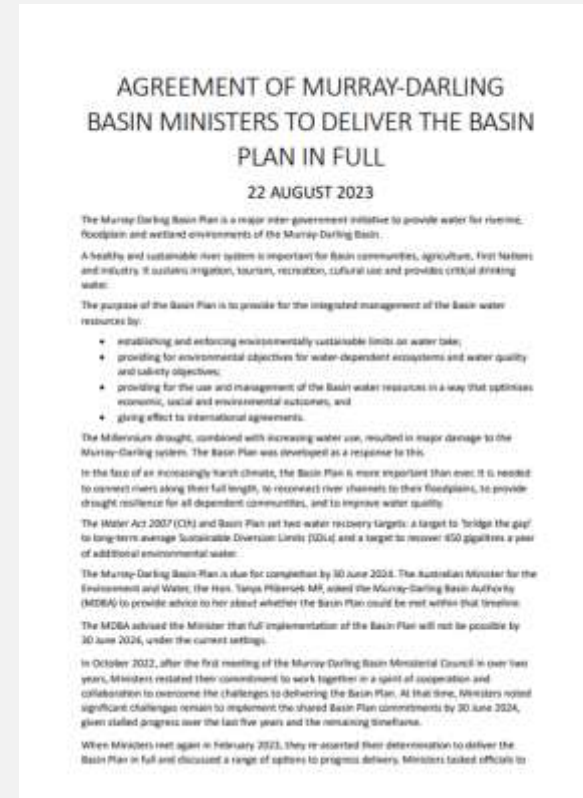
Complete SDLAM projects

Maximise the impacts of water recovery by relaxing constraints

Improve outcomes for First Nations

4 NSW Water Resource Plans

Water reform – the case for change



The Restoring Our Rivers Act 2023 - overview

- Timeframe to deliver viable **SDLAM projects extended to 31 December 2026**
- **More water recovery options** to deliver the 450 GL/y by **31 December 2027**
- Removing the **statutory 1,500 GL/y cap** on water purchase
- Minister **to consider socio-economic impacts of 450GL voluntary water** purchase programs
- MDBA to develop a **Constraints Relaxation Implementation Roadmap** by the end of 2024
- Strengthening the **powers of the Inspector-General of Water Compliance**
- Explicitly recognising **First Nations' outcomes**
- **Basin Plan review** to consider the **management of climate change risks**
- Significant reforms to improve the **integrity and transparency of water markets**



First Nations outcomes

- **The Water Act now provides:**
 - That the Act and Basin Plan must take into account ***spiritual, cultural, environmental, social and economic matters relevant to First Nations people,***
 - For a second First Nations member of the Murray–Darling Basin Authority
- **The Australian Government has also provided:**
 - **\$20 million** for Cultural Flows Cultural Economy
 - **\$60 million** in additional funding for the Aboriginal Water Entitlements Program (AWEP) – for a **\$100m investment**



Improving the health of the Upper Murrumbidgee

Commitments to improve the health of the Upper Murrumbidgee:

- **\$30 million** to support the supply of additional water to the upper Murrumbidgee if drought-like conditions occur between now until 2028.
- **\$4.8 million** for the review of the Snowy Water Inquiry Outcomes Implementation Deed
 - Plus **\$500,000** for First Nations participation
- **\$15 million** over three years to improve catchment and river health
 - Plus an additional **\$5 million** to support the science and monitoring



Supply and Constraints

Under the new timelines, states have until:

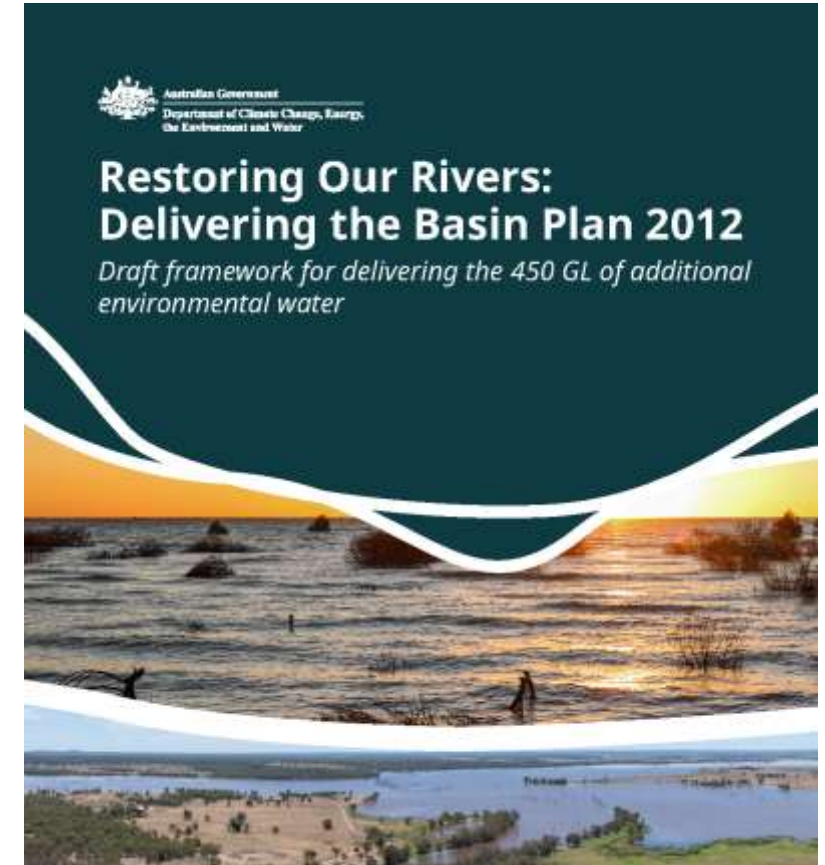
- **30 June 2025** – To propose new SDLAM projects
- **30 June 2026** – To amend or withdraw existing projects
- **31 December 2026** – To deliver these projects

There is also increased accountability:

- 1 project has been withdrawn – Yanko Creek Offtake

Framework for delivering the 450 GL

- Draft policy framework released 30 January 2024
- Tools that could be used to deliver the 450 GL
- Proposed implementation approach for 2024
- Water recovery will be informed by three key (statutory) principles:
 - **enhancing environmental outcomes**
 - **minimising socio-economic impacts**
 - **achieving value for money.**



Framework for delivering the 450 GL

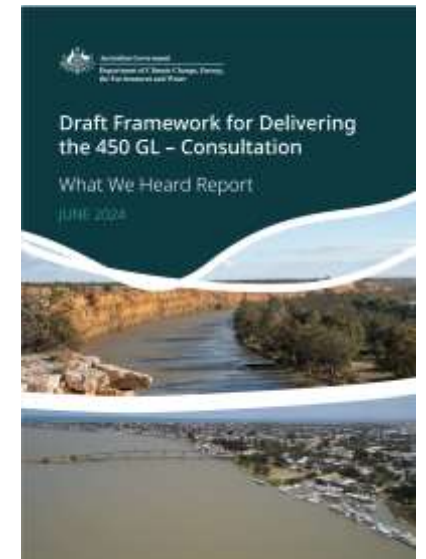
The draft framework outlines three programs to deliver the 450 GL target.

1. **Resilient Rivers Program** – **open and over \$520 million available** for infrastructure projects. Can expand to include rules changes, land and water partnerships, and other ways to recover water
2. **Sustainable Communities Program** — **open and more than \$300 million available to states** for community adjustment assistance for Basin communities impacted by voluntary water purchase.
3. **Voluntary Water Purchase** – purchase of water entitlements from willing sellers by the Commonwealth



What we heard – strategic and innovative delivery

- The three principles – enhancing environmental outcomes, minimising socio-economic impacts and achieving value for taxpayers money – were broadly supported.
- The approach to implementation and funding should be flexible to facilitate strategic and innovative approaches.
- Some states, irrigation networks and peaks want the option of an integrated approach across the three programs.
- We are working on to provide an integrated pathway across infrastructure, water purchase and sustainable communities.



What we heard – Sustainable Communities

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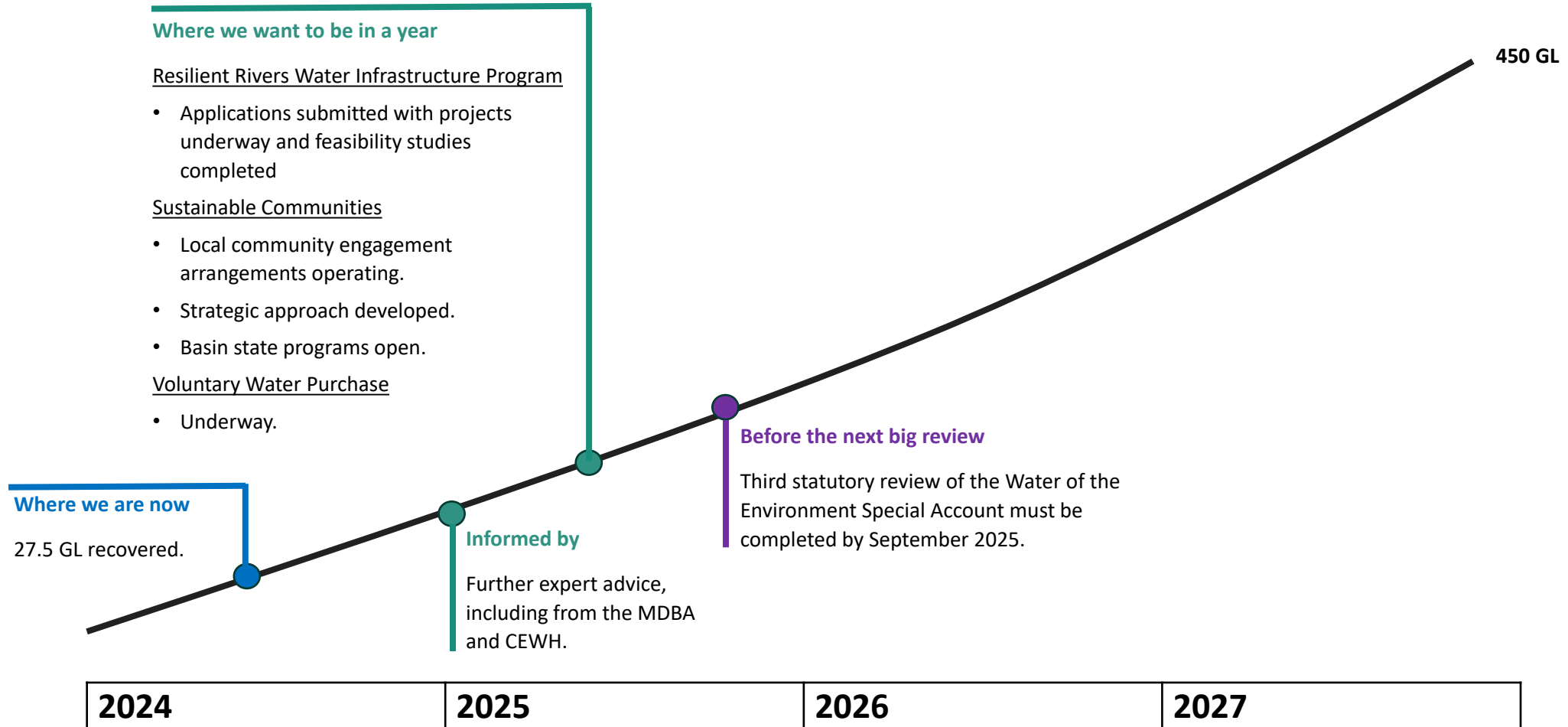
The feedback and independent reviews have been clear

- Community adjustment assistance funding up front, to support diversification and resilience, informed by place-based conversations.

The Sustainable Communities Program is designed to do this.

- \$300 million to states to support Basin communities + delivery costs from 1 July 2024 – 30 June 2028
- To facilitate regional, place-based engagement to develop local initiatives.
- To maximise benefits for communities, states need to leverage other regional development investments, to work closely with local councils and industry and other stakeholders on a strategic approach.

Where we want to be



Check points on the way to December 2027

- Constraints Relaxation Implementation Roadmap: late 2024
- MDBA 450 GL advice: mid 2025
- States to bring forward new supply projects: mid 2025
- Third statutory WESA review: end 2025
 - Funding, program design, effectiveness – including Sustainable Communities
- Basin Plan Review: 2026
- Review check point for Sustainable Communities funding: mid 2026
- Reconciliation of Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment Mechanism: end 2026

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Working together

