

**Draft Basin Plan – Initial Engagement to inform the development of the
South Australian Government response**

**KEY VIEWS AND ISSUES RAISED AT THE BERRI STAKEHOLDER MEETING
Berri Resort, Tuesday 20 December 2011**

Hosted by the Honourable Paul Caica MP, Minister for Water and the River Murray

Overview of the meeting

The meeting commenced with an opening address from the Minister for Water and the River Murray and presentations from Department for Water (DFW) officers on the State Government consultation process on its response to the draft Basin Plan and an initial appraisal of the draft Basin Plan.

The Minister noted the importance of a unified approach and community support to get the best possible outcomes from the final Basin Plan. The Minister also asked participants to disseminate information to their respective communities and groups.

Meeting participants provided their feedback and initial comments on the draft Basin Plan. The key views and issues expressed by participants have been grouped into common themes and summarised below.

Unified South Australian position

- General support for a unified South Australian position.
- The need for South Australia to have a strong voice to ensure that our views are heard in conjunction with those of communities in the Eastern States.
- A national approach to Murray-Darling Basin management is a positive of the draft Basin Plan.

Baseline Diversion Limits and Sustainable Diversion Limits

- Concerns were raised about the proposed Baseline Diversion Limit and Sustainable Diversion Limit in the draft Basin Plan for the River Murray in South Australia.
- It is unclear how the Baseline Diversion Limit has been calculated and concerns were raised regarding the values used for the licence held by SA Water for Metropolitan Adelaide and changes due to modelling for climate adjustment.
- It is important to ensure that South Australia's history of responsible water management and efficient irrigation practices are taken into account.
- There is uncertainty about where the water that is required for the 'downstream reduction' component of the water recovery target will be recovered.
- All water entitlement holders have a role to play in contributing to water recovery and there is a desire for SA Water to play a role to ease some of the burden on river communities.
- Security of water entitlements is critical and there is a need for the Plan to include adequate provisions to ensure security is not eroded.
- Infrastructure projects should be explored as a key element of Commonwealth water recovery.
- It is important to investigate infrastructure projects that could improve environmental outcomes e.g. use of Chowilla regulator will help to optimise environmental water use; connecting the South East drainage system and floodways to the Coorong may assist in salinity management in the Southern Lagoon.
- The proposed 2015 review of Sustainable Diversion Limits was seen as positive by some and as unlikely to achieve much by others.

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Commonwealth funding opportunities

- There is currently limited detail available from the Australian Government about funding programs and investment strategies designed to help communities transition to new Sustainable Diversion Limits.
- South Australia needs to think strategically about how to access investment to benefit our communities. There was discussion about how to ensure South Australian communities receive maximum benefit from Commonwealth investment programs.
- There is a need for more flexibility in Commonwealth investment programs to enable South Australia to benefit.
- Some opportunities for diversification in the region include a medical school at Renmark in the Riverland and thermal solar plants/interconnectors for power plants.
- A view that money should be spent where the best outcomes can be achieved and this may mean investment upstream.

Risks to South Australia

- It was noted that the Riverland area was identified as one of the areas that is more likely to be vulnerable to reductions in irrigated agriculture. It is important that potential broader community impacts are considered.
- Discussion about the ecological risks and trade-offs and the need for more detailed information on this issue e.g. what is improved and what is lost under 2750 GL?
- Implementation costs of the draft Basin Plan are currently unclear.

Opportunities to improve river management

- The matter of system constraints that may be affecting delivery of environmental water needs to be considered as a priority, including options to purchase flood easements.
- Opportunities to remove constraints, wherever they exist, should be pursued with vigour.
- Current river operating rules may also be considered a constraint. The rules need to be reviewed across the Basin to ensure water is being managed efficiently and effectively.
- Discussion about the need for an audit of the system from the border to the mouth to look at opportunities for environmental works and measures.

Implementing the Basin Plan

- There was some discussion about how local communities can be involved in implementing the Basin Plan and how 'localism' will work in South Australia.
- The Authority's role in enforcement and compliance is currently unclear - what will occur if States do not comply?

Other information

- The South Australian Government is undertaking further rigorous analysis of the draft Basin Plan.
- Some water is being delivered from the South East drains to the southern lagoon of the Coorong but it is no substitute for flows from the River Murray.
- The Minister for Water and the River Murray noted that the Plan must take into account the fact that South Australia capped our take back in 1969 and recognise that our irrigators have been early adopters of and investors in, water efficient technology.
- The Australian Government has allocated \$1.8 million to South Australia for funding the feasibility assessment of potential State and community environmental works and measures funding. The South Australian Murray-Darling Basin Natural Resources Management Board has been contracted to look at community project ideas and will let people know about this project shortly.

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