

The Water Channel

ADF's channel of communication to the farmer

12 April 2012

Speak up and be heard! Draft Basin Plan [submissions](#) close Monday, 16 April 2012

The 20-week consultation on the draft Basin Plan is coming to a close. While the Murray Darling Basin Authority has at least shown a willingness to meet over the last few months, we are disappointed in the small target approach using discreet Open Houses and invitation-only stakeholder roundtables.

This low key consultation process down played public and media scrutiny of issues and concerns raised by the community. While the tables of experts at the Open Houses did allow individual discussion on technical points, it worked against promoting a collective understanding.

The deadline for [submissions](#) is Monday, 16 April 2012, so you still have a few days to tell the MDBA what you think needs to change, or how the Basin Plan will affect your enterprise.

It doesn't have to be long – just an email with a few lines will be plenty. Send to submissions@mdba.gov.au

What are Australians *really* willing to pay?

A [CSIRO study](#) supposedly proving the economic benefits of 2800GL was belatedly released last week. It concluded, among other things, that healthier habitats were worth \$3 billion-\$8 billion, and aesthetic appreciation of more water was worth \$330 million. The media duly presented this as rather dwarfing the MDBA's estimated [\\$542 million](#) loss in the gross value of irrigated production. On further investigation, we found the healthier habitat value was based on [surveys](#) of people's willingness to pay in the abstract for, say, improving the Coorong's health from poor to good. The answer in this case was \$173 a year per household for 10 years.

Of course we rather suspect most households would feel differently if asked to actually part with the cash via a levy on their annual council property rates. And we bet they weren't asked if a 1% increase in healthy wetlands was worth, say, the loss of 500 dairy farms and three milk factories.

The aesthetic appreciation value was derived from property values. Interestingly, while house prices at the lower lakes were estimated to rise by \$186 million with higher lake levels, more water through the Barmah-Millewa forest would push down prices on the Victorian side by \$22 million, probably because of flooding...

Australian Dairy Industry Council submission

The Australian Dairy Industry Council has lodged its submission on the draft Basin Plan. For a summary of the ADIC position, see overleaf.

The whole submission can be read on the [Dairy Australia](#) website; follow the quick link to the Murray Darling Basin Plan.

Meetings

2 April: ADIC Basin Taskforce chair Daryl Hoey briefed Moira Shire councilors on the Basin Plan's impacts on milk production and jobs in northern Victoria.

12 April: MDBA Open House, Sydney, noon-2pm, The Barnett Long Room, Customs House, 31 Alfred Street, Circular Quay

13 April: ADIC Basin Taskforce members to meet MDBA CEO Rhondda Dickson to discuss the ADIC submission.

13 April: MDBA Open House, Melbourne, noon-2pm, Red Rotunda Room, State Library of Victoria, 231 Swanston St

Australian Dairy Farmers and Australian Dairy Industry Council position

The draft Basin Plan and the Federal water recovery program have not effectively balanced environmental needs with those of the community and the economy.

1. Water recovery target should be set at the level required to meet catchment SDLs (1636GL)
 - a. 247GL in northern system
 - b. 1318GL in southern connected system
 - c. 71GL in southern disconnected valleys.
2. 2015 review should assess environmental works and measures, improved river operations and new knowledge to achieve downstream environmental outcomes.
3. No further general buyback tenders in the southern system. Buyback limited to strategic purchases linked to community-led efficiency projects.
4. Remaining buyback and infrastructure funding (~\$2 billion in Water for the Future Fund + \$1.4 billion committed for further buyback 2015-2019) pooled and reprioritised for investment in:
 - a. \$400 million to extend On-Farm Irrigation Efficiency Program to 2017, and deliver at least 100GL in farm water savings to the environment.
 - b. Additional funding for Private Irrigation Infrastructure Operators Program (PIIOP) in the NSW Murray and Murrumbidgee.
 - c. \$200 million to decommission Lowbidgee Irrigation District and buy back its supplementary licences to free up an annual average 100GL for environment.
 - d. \$30 million to rehabilitate Murray Swamps in SA, to save an average 63GL/yr in evaporation, and control acidity and a rising saline water table affecting lower lakes.
 - e. Upgrading and automating barrages in lower lakes to better control and improve flows to Coorong and Murray mouth.
 - f. Works to redirect south-east drainage system into Coorong south lagoon, to resolve salinity problems by boosting inflows from 10.9GL/yr to 26GL/yr.
 - g. Environmental works for greater water efficiency and improved flows through key indicator sites across the Basin. For example, \$105 million to water key sites, red gum forests and wetlands in Victoria using 550GL less than otherwise required.
 - h. Improved river operations, including a comprehensive real-time monitoring network to guide the timing and volume of environmental releases. A 10% improvement could deliver watering events that would otherwise need another 800GL in environmental entitlements.
 - i. Remove causeway and remains of bund restricting flows through Narrung Narrows, and dredge Narrows to improve freshwater exchange between Lakes Alexandrina and Albert.
 - j. Study on feasibility and environmental cost/benefits of pipeline connecting Lake Albert and Coorong, to improve salinity in both waterbodies.
5. Groundwater SDLs in Victoria set as the Permitted Consumptive Volume (PCV) in State groundwater management plans. Where no PCV is in force, the SDL is the Baseline Diversion Limit.
6. Stock and domestic water must be permanently exempted from any reductions to meet the Basin Plan's sustainable diversion limits for ground or surface water.
7. Access to a reliable and affordable water source for farms around Lake Albert.
8. The Murray River operated to maintain a minimum 0.5m AHD past Murray Bridge, to ensure water access for farms on the Murray Swamps and integrity of levee banks and hydrologic balance.
9. Salinity levels no greater than 1000EC at Wellington (600mg/L) and 1500EC (900mg/L) in the lakes.

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