



MEDIA RELEASE

MDBA declares 'game changing' positive results for the Basin but sends a wakeup call – we need to move beyond 'just adding more water'

24 July 2025, Canberra, ACT: Today's publication of the Murray Darling Basin Authority's (MDBA) 2025 Basin Plan Evaluation and Sustainable Rivers Audit has found the health of the Basin has improved, advising that *"water for the environment is essential, but on its own is likely not sufficient"*¹.

In what is dubbed the *"most significant body of evidence to date"*² on the effectiveness of the Basin Plan, the MDBA's third Evaluation finds very positive outcomes for river flows as *"most of the original targets for water recovery have been met"*³, but highlights *"flow management is only one component of the suite of integrated management activities needed"*⁴.

The National Irrigators' Council has described many parts of the Evaluation as refreshing and a wakeup call needed to shape thinking in the Basin going forward and is calling for more quick thinking on how to determine and prioritise a package of strategic environmental investments in these complementary (non-flow) measures to inform next steps on the Basin Plan, given the Evaluation found this as a missing piece of the current Plan puzzle.

"There is a lot to celebrate in this Evaluation in terms of environmental outcomes," said NIC CEO, Zara Lowien. "It is no small feat and whilst it has come at a cost to some communities and industries to have most of the original water recovery targets complete, the health of the Basin has turned around."

"What the Evaluation finds is you need to do more than 'just add water' to improve all environmental outcomes, particularly for native fish which have had mixed results, despite plenty of water and it's really refreshing to hear the MDBA acknowledge that 'it is more complex' than the flawed assumption of the original Basin Plan that water alone would be sufficient."⁵ said Ms Lowien.

"We hope all stakeholders and decision-makers can see this learning and overcome the very simplistic assumption of 'just adding water'," said Ms Lowien.

"It's very hard to look at these findings and argue the top priority for our Basin environments is even more water from farmers, when 72% of flows are now for the environment, Sustainable Diversion Limits are in place, and clear evidence that non-water threats are holding back environmental outcomes and there is no clear strategy and little action to address these gaps."

"These findings will throw into troubled waters the relentless pursuit of more and more water buybacks from farmers," said Ms Lowien, "the evidence is clear this is no longer the big issue for the environment as it was before the Basin Plan during the Millenium Drought, and at increasing costs⁶."

¹ [2025 Basin Plan Evaluation Report - Overview](#) P 4.

² P 3.

³ P 32.

⁴ P 49.

⁵ P 4.

⁶ P 6.

"We fully support a rethink of the Basin Plan that questions how to best prioritise investment to maximise environmental outcomes."

It isn't only industry calling for this re-think as part of the 2026 Basin Plan Review saying "communities, farmers and scientists and even the MDBA, are all calling for this new chapter focused on a broader plan beyond just water volumes," said Ms Lowien.

"The new Water Minister, Murray Watt, has a real opportunity to work collaboratively in partnership with communities, on a much-needed reset, and refocus the Basin Plan towards better environmental outcomes rather than a numbers game that can hurt communities and industries."

"We are on the record expressing our ongoing concerns for how socio-economic impact assessments are done at the Basin-scale⁷, and it is really pleasing to hear the MDBA acknowledge this, saying '*these Basin-scale trends may mask divergent experiences at the local level*'. "⁸

"It is also refreshing to hear the MDBA acknowledge there will be a time lag for the environment to fully respond to rebalanced water sharing arrangements, with further outcomes expected, as this shows there is time to pause, refocus, and get the next steps on the Basin Plan done right offering a chance to enhance environmental outcomes with the water already available and ensuring viable, agriculturally productive Basin communities."

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Our key quotes from the MDBA's 2025 Evaluation Overview:

- "Most of the original targets for water recovery have been met"⁹
- "Water for the environment is essential, but on its own is likely not sufficient. Factors such as water quality, riparian and floodplain management, pest control, instream habitat, river operations, constraints and works, and environmental water portfolio management are also crucial to achieve environmental outcomes."¹⁰
- "When the Basin Plan commenced it was assumed that water for the environment to key sites would be sufficient to maintain ecological health across the Basin. We have learnt it is more complex and challenging than this..."¹¹
- "...deliveries of water for the environment alone are not sufficient. Other measures, such as water quality management, riparian and floodplain management, pest control, instream habitat, river operations, constraints and works, and environmental water portfolio management are crucial to the achievement of long-term environmental outcomes."¹²
- "The management of flow regimes, particularly the timing and patterns of flow, is vital to achieving outcomes for native fish. However, flow management is only one component of the suite of integrated management activities needed to build fish population resilience. Complementary management actions such as introduced species control, re-establishment of threatened and non-threatened species, improved fish passage solutions, and habitat protection and restoration are also important for improving fish outcomes across the Basin."

⁷ [National Irrigators' Council - Basin communities fear being overlooked in upcoming Evaluation](#)

⁸ P 63

⁹ P 32

¹⁰ P 4.

¹¹ P 4.

¹² P 42.



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- "... It should be noted that a considerable time lag is expected between short term positive outcomes from water for the environment and full observable benefits to fish populations"¹³
- "The cost of recovering water, whether through purchases or infrastructure projects, is increasing, and previous investments in water efficiency have most likely already leveraged the most cost-effective methods. Moving forward, a considered approach will be required to minimise the negative impacts of water recovery while maximising environmental benefits and ensuring value for money."¹⁴

¹³ P 48.

¹⁴ Page 5