



Opening statement – Senate Estimates

Friday 23 October 2020

Good morning.

I'm pleased to report that storages in the Basin are sitting on 56% – 20% ahead of where they were at the same time last year. ABARES expects the average price of water will be around \$250 to \$300 per megalitre this season – much lower than the \$550 from last year.

Winter crop prospects are looking very favourable in New South Wales - welcome news for producers who have faced multiple years of drought. ABARES is forecasting the largest winter crop harvest since the record of 2016-17. Winter crop production is forecast to increase by 64% in 2020-21 to 47.9 million tonnes - 20% above average.

And of course, increased flows this season have benefitted the environment, recreation and communities in many parts of the Basin although some areas remain in drought.

The MDBA welcomed the appointment of our new chair, Sir Angus Houston. Sir Angus and Phillip travelled around the NSW Riverina earlier this month. The improved season was clear from the look of the country. It has also lifted spirits.

Sir Angus has also conducted a great number of virtual meetings with Ministers, stakeholders and community representatives. I'd like to thank everyone in the Basin who gave up their time for these meetings. I know he found it invaluable to hear firsthand people's perspectives on the water reform journey.

While people might be feeling a little more optimistic, they are also feeling that decisions that impact them are still being made *for them* and not *with*

them. Communities are still stressed. This is evident from Robbie Sefton’s examination of the socio-economic conditions in the Basin and from the feedback we receive from our regionally located staff.

We know we are on a difficult reform journey and that for some, it’s painful. We – the MDBA, but also our colleagues in government – are adjusting as we learn from locals and as new science and information becomes available.

I’d like to think the best example of this is the fact that MDBA is on track to have a third of our workforce living and working in Basin communities by the middle of next year. We’ve attracted new people to our team – many from the regional towns where our offices are based. They have diverse skills, perspectives, networks and life experiences – and are actively contributing to new ways of working, both with communities and within our organisation.

We have already made inroads to [improve transparency](#). Every month we publish a snapshot of [environmental flows](#) in the river as well as a monthly summary of rainfall, inflows and water quality information – known [as Basin in Brief](#).

Next year we’ll launch a monthly webinar series and swing open the doors on how we run the river.

We know there is more for us to do at the grassroots level, but having people living and working in places like Griffith, Mildura, Murray Bridge and Goondiwindi means the connections and relationships develop more easily – whether that’s a conversation at school drop off, or in the supermarket or at industry or community events. These new relationships are all making a difference. And we will keep building on that.

Thank you.