



Australian Government

Australian Government response to the
Select Committee on the Multi-Jurisdictional
Management and Execution of the Murray Darling Basin
Plan report:

Final report and report on Constitution Alteration (Water
Resources) 2019

May 2024

Response

Recommendation 1

The committee recommends that the Commonwealth and basin states clarify how existing state water sharing plans and operations interact with the Water Resource Plans and related processes that have been introduced by the Basin Plan.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Recommendation 2

The committee recommends that the Commonwealth and basin states, through the Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council, create, maintain and make easily accessible a detailed, comprehensive, clearly set-out and collectively-owned roadmap of the Murray-Darling basin's governance framework which clarifies decision-making and accountability between levels of governments and agencies for each aspect of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Recommendation 3

The committee recommends that the Commonwealth and basin states, through the Ministerial Council, provide an update on the implementation of the outstanding Productivity Commission's 2018 recommendations for the implementation of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan, and articulate reasons for delays.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Recommendation 4

The committee recommends that the bill not be passed.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Recommendation 5

The committee recommends that the Australian Government work with basin states to commission an independent basin-wide audit of the processes and systems underlying water accounts to identify whether the accounts currently enable a holistic view of the reality of water in the Murray-Darling basin.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Recommendation 6

The committee recommends that the Murray-Darling Basin Authority and the Office of the Inspector-General for Water Compliance, work with Murray-Darling basin states to develop best-practice principles to better align, where practical and appropriate, the compliance and enforcement approaches of governments, such as terminology, reporting requirements of regulators, and penalties.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Recommendation 7

The committee recommends that the Murray-Darling Basin Authority and the Inspector-General of Water Compliance, work with basin states to clarify the division of compliance roles and responsibilities between Commonwealth and state governments and their agencies, and the Inspector-General's role in resolving multijurisdictional issues. Where there is duplication, uncertainty, or absence of compliance responsibility between governments, the Murray-Darling Basin Authority and the Inspector-General should work with states to address this.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Recommendation 8

The committee recommends that the Commonwealth Environmental Water Office work with state counterparts to build a roadmap that provides public clarification on the interactions between Commonwealth and state environmental watering agencies, particularly clarification on how environmental watering planning documents interact at different government levels.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Recommendation 9

The committee recommends that the Commonwealth Environmental Water Office work with state counterparts and use the roadmap from the previous recommendation to address any duplications or inefficiencies between Commonwealth and state environmental watering plans.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Recommendation 10

The committee recommends that the Commonwealth Environmental Water Office (CEWO) review its communication practices for whether the standard for public updates could be improved. The CEWO's communications should provide concise and timely public information on the objectives and reasons behind each environmental watering decision before the event occurs, public updates during watering events, and identify whether objectives were met after each environmental watering event.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Recommendation 11

The committee recommends that the Australian Government work with state counterparts to review existing evaluation mechanisms for Basin Plan environmental watering decisions and identify whether the decisions of environmental water holders, and the measurable ecological outcomes framework against which these decisions are evaluated, could be made more accessible.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Recommendation 12

The committee recommends that the Australian Government work with basin states to adopt a best-practice, principles-based approach to communicating and disseminating information to all key stakeholders, including Indigenous communities in the basin.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Recommendation 13

The committee recommends that the Commonwealth and basin states work to improve representation of all impacted stakeholders in the development of Water Resource Plans (WRPs), including by:

- identifying and implementing best-practice approaches to WRP development, communication, and engagement;
- ensuring that sufficient information about WRPs is made available to all stakeholders in advance of engagement and include 'plain English' and culturally appropriate versions to expand their uptake; and
- ensuring that all state-based Basin Plan and WRP coordination committees provide adequate opportunities to enable the timely and authentic engagement with Indigenous communities and their leaders.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Recommendation 14

The committee recommends that the Murray-Darling Basin Authority continue to build capacity and expertise through communication with Indigenous leaders and their communities throughout the basin to ensure basin states are complying with and prioritising their Indigenous commitments.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Recommendation 15

The committee recommends that the Australian Government extend the life of the Murray-Darling Basin Indigenous River Ranger Program for a period of 10 years to ensure a long-term approach is taken to monitoring the effects of the implementation of the Basin Plan.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Recommendation 16

The committee recommends that the Commonwealth work with Murray-Darling basin states, through the Ministerial Council, to develop best-practice community consultation guidelines for Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment Mechanism (SDLAM) projects, and clarify processes and responsibilities for ensuring that standards of consultation are appropriately applied.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Recommendation 17

The committee recommends that the Australian Government work with the Murray-Darling Basin Authority and Murray-Darling basin states to review whether current research initiatives across governments and the private sector provide a coordinated, whole-of-basin, and long-term approach to overcoming current and future major water-related challenges in the basin.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Recommendation 18

The committee recommends that the Australian Government investigate investing in innovative measurement tools and infrastructure to enhance water conservation capacity in the basin.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Dissenting Recommendation 1 (Patrick)

That the bill be passed.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Dissenting Recommendation 1 (Nationals)

The Government should review all recommendations made by previous inquiries into the Basin Plan, both parliamentary and commissioned by previous Commonwealth enquiries, and list actions that have been taken to implement these recommendations.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Dissenting Recommendation 2 (Nationals)

The Basin Officials Committee provide to the Ministerial Council for ratification a methodology to accredit an offset value for complementary measures which have already been identified and approved by Ministerial Council. These measures include, but are not limited to improved fish passage, addressing cold water pollution and undertaking efficiency measures that leave water in the system in the absence of transferred licenced water entitlement.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Dissenting Recommendation 3 (Nationals)

Implement the Productivity Commission's recommendation 4.2 from the Improving Implementation of the Basin Plan report (2019) 'Basin governments should be open to the possibility of extending the 30 June 2024 deadline for specific supply measures to be operational where an extension would be necessary to allow worthwhile projects to be retained.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Dissenting Recommendation 4 (Nationals)

Allow Basin States to notify the Authority of altered or new supply measures that meet the objectives of the Water Act and deliver improved environmental and ecological outcomes.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Dissenting Recommendation 5 (Nationals)

Ensure efficiency measures approved by Ministerial Council adhere to the neutral or improved socio-economic outcomes in line with the criteria agreed to by the Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council at the December 2018 Council meeting.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Dissenting Recommendation 6 (Nationals)

Using methodology approved by Ministerial Council, establish a mechanism to approve off-farm efficiency designed to operate and to improve environmental outcomes in relation to the Murray Darling Basin that may or may not result in associated transferrable entitlement.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Dissenting Recommendation 7 (Nationals)

Amend efficiency measures policies, programs and associated documents to remove reference to a fixed volume, i.e. 450GL, to more realistically reflect the volume is not fixed and is dependent on many factors.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Dissenting Recommendation 8 (Nationals)

The reconciliation of adjustments to be undertaken in 2024/25 must be based on real data (such as the SDL Compliance reports) and not on modelled assumptions. There must be no buyback if a supply measure project is incomplete, but water resources are compliant with the SDLs.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Dissenting Recommendation 1 (Greens)

The Murray-Darling Basin Plan be delivered in full and on time, including the 450GL of environmental water promised to South Australia.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Dissenting Recommendation 2 (Greens)

The Australian Greens Murray-Darling Commission of Inquiry Bill 2019, establishing a commission of inquiry, with the same powers as a royal commission, to inquire into the management of the Murray-Darling Basin water resources and related matters, be passed.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Dissenting Recommendation 3 (Greens)

The committed investment in cultural flows be progressed as a matter of urgency.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Dissenting Recommendation 4 (Greens)

The National Party be stripped of the water portfolio.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Dissenting Recommendation 5 (Greens)

Water buybacks must be reinstated as the primary means for recovering water for the environment.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Dissenting Recommendation 6 (Greens)

A full audit of water recovered to date be conducted to properly examine the Commonwealth Government's expenditure on efficiency projects.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Dissenting Recommendation 7 (Greens)

That any changes to the BDL and SDL are done in accordance with requirements set out in the Water Act and Basin Plan and are an environmentally sustainable level of take, backed by science.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Dissenting Recommendation 8 (Greens)

The Commonwealth Government set a target to reduce Australia's greenhouse gas emissions by 75 per cent on 2005 levels by 2030 and to net zero by 2035.

Response

NOTED

The Government notes this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.