

Executive Summary

This is the report of the Senate Select Committee on the Murray-Darling Basin Plan. The report considers the evidence the committee has gathered from submissions and hearings in the basin states. This evidence has provided the committee with a broad range of views on the impacts of the implementation of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan (the Plan) and associated Commonwealth programs on regional communities.

The Plan was legislated for in the *Water Act 2007*, and developed over several years by the Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MBDA). It was finalised and presented to the federal parliament on 26 November 2012.

The Plan is a significant reform to water management in the Murray-Darling Basin (the basin) which for the first time treats the basin as a single system rather than separate state-based systems. By returning water to the environment, it aims to deliver economic, social and environmental outcomes across the basin to ensure sustainable, productive communities and industries in the basin. The Plan sets an extraction limit of 2750 gigalitres (GL) of water to be recovered from consumptive use for the environment each year.

The committee supports the overarching principles of the Plan and acknowledges that some elements of implementation are producing and encouraging efficient water use and positive economic, social and environmental outcomes. However, the committee was concerned to hear that several elements of the Plan, and in some instances the way the Plan has been implemented, were having negative impacts on economies and communities in the basin. These issues were both broad and state-based, and are discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 of the report.

The committee considers the implementation of the Plan requires greater effort to minimise its negative impacts.

As the Plan is being implemented, work is occurring in various states to reassess the volume of water to be extracted for the environment. In this report, the committee has commented on methods that the MDBA and other agencies should use to improve outcomes for communities and industries in the basin. The committee has also made a number of recommendations about ways to improve the Plan and the manner in which it is implemented.

The committee wishes to thank all the individuals, organisations and state, territory and federal government officials who gave evidence to the committee.

