

**Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts  
Legislation Committee**

Answers to questions on notice

**Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts portfolio**

Budget Estimates, May 2010

<b>Outcome:</b>	4	<b>Question No:</b>	69
<b>Program:</b>	4.1		
<b>Division/Agency:</b>	Murray-Darling Basin Authority		
<b>Topic:</b>	Basin plan - national water account input		
<b>Hansard Page ECA:</b>	44 (26/5/10)		

**Senator JOYCE asked:**

**Senator JOYCE**—When will you deliver the first version of the national water account?

...

**Senator JOYCE**—Minister, are you confident that this information will be provided in a form that is accessible prior to the 16-week consultation plan?

**Senator Wong**—I am not sure that the two are necessarily—there is a lot of data that is being considered in the context of the authority's preparation of the Basin Plan. I would be the first to acknowledge that it would have been better if this country had started work on this plan earlier. However, we were not in government until the end of 2007 and we commenced work pretty quickly on the plan. If your question is to what extent are aspects of the national water account required for the Basin Plan, I do have views about that but I would probably want officers at the table to assist with that. They will be here either in outcome 4 or when the Murray-Darling Basin Authority appears before the committee.

**Senator JOYCE**—Fair enough. ...

**Answer:**

Under the Commonwealth *Water Act 2007* the Bureau of Meteorology (Bureau) has responsibility for compiling and publishing the National Water Account.

In 2009 the Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) worked with the Bureau to prepare a water accounting report for the Murray-Darling Basin as part of the Methods Pilot for the National Water Account. It reported on the years ending 30 June 2007 and 30 June 2008. The report was published by the Bureau in December 2009 as part of the Pilot National Water Account (NWA). The Pilot NWA is available on the Bureau's website at [http://www.bom.gov.au/water/nwa/document/Pilot\\_NWA.pdf](http://www.bom.gov.au/water/nwa/document/Pilot_NWA.pdf).

During 2010, the MDBA compiled a series of 19 regional water accounts to support the release of the Guide to the proposed Basin Plan for stakeholder consultation. This set of

**Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts  
Legislation Committee**

Answers to questions on notice

**Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts portfolio**

Budget Estimates, May 2010

regional water accounts is for the same years as the Pilot NWA and will provide information at a more detailed level than the Pilot NWA.

Water data required for preparing the proposed Basin Plan has come from a variety of sources reflecting differing requirements of the components of the proposed Basin Plan. The National Water Account is not specifically needed to prepare the proposed Basin Plan.

A key distinction between the proposed Basin Plan and the National Water Account is that the data requirements for developing the Basin Plan have a different time scale to the data collected for the National Water Account. The National Water Account will only cover the reporting year, which for the first National water Account is the 2009-10 year. Data needed to prepare the proposed Basin Plan considers both historical data from well before this period as well as modelled data that includes forecasting for future events.

**Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts  
Legislation Committee**

Answers to questions on notice

**Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts portfolio**

Budget Estimates, May 2010

<b>Outcome:</b>	4	<b>Question No:</b>	70
<b>Program:</b>	4.1		
<b>Division/Agency:</b>	Murray-Darling Basin Authority		
<b>Topic:</b>	MDB Diversions		
<b>Hansard Page ECA:</b>	Written Question on Notice		

**Senator BIRMINGHAM asked:**

1. What are the estimated number of unmetered offtakes or diversions throughout the MDB?
2. What is the estimated volume of illegal diversion within the MDB?

**Answer:**

1. Metering of offtakes and diversions is primarily a matter for Basin States, who manage the water resource and account for diversions against the MDB Cap (currently).
  - Exact data are not available on the number of unmetered offtakes or diversions for the MDB. However, a national *Stocktake of Australia's non-urban water metering systems* (SKM 2008) presents state-based estimates. The report is available at <http://www.environment.gov.au/water/publications/agriculture/pubs/stocktake-water-meter.pdf>

It is important to bear in mind that many unmetered offtakes or diversions extract very small volumes (for example stock and domestic extractions) and metering may not be cost-effective or necessary to manage the whole water resource. In addition, some diversions such as floodplain harvesting may not be able to be practically metered, but other forms of measurement are available.

2. Monitoring and investigating illegal water diversion is a matter for Basin States. Basin States do not publish estimates of illegal water diversions as a matter of course due to sensitivity and confidentiality considerations.

**Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts  
Legislation Committee**

Answers to questions on notice

**Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts portfolio**

Budget Estimates, May 2010

<b>Outcome:</b>	4	<b>Question No:</b>	71
<b>Program:</b>	4.1		
<b>Division/Agency:</b>	Murray-Darling Basin Authority		
<b>Topic:</b>	Sustainable Diversion Limits		
<b>Hansard Page ECA:</b>	Written Question on Notice		

**Senator JOYCE asked:**

1. Will the Federal Government ensure that decisions on sustainable diversion limits are only taken when the full community and economic impacts of any further reduction of water to irrigators or farm enterprises are known?
2. Will these decisions be made before any further water trading is undertaken between States?

**Answer:**

1. Given the significance of the Basin Plan, the Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) decided to seek additional feedback from its stakeholders, prior to finalising the proposed Basin Plan for statutory consultation. To this end, the MDBA released a comprehensive Guide to the proposed Basin Plan, including the proposed long-term average sustainable diversion limits (SDLs), on 8 October 2010.

We need a healthy river system, we need to acknowledge the importance of food production and we need strong communities. The government wants to get the balance right between the needs of the environment and the needs of rural communities. Broad consultation and meaningful engagement on any proposed plan is a priority.

The MDBA is undertaking a range of engagement and communications activities to support the release of the Guide and to encourage feedback. This includes holding a series of community information sessions across the Basin, as well as in the capital city of each Basin state until mid November 2010. Details on the location of the information sessions are available at <http://thebasinplan.mdba.gov.au/>.

The Guide provides stakeholders with an overview of the proposed Basin Plan ahead of its release and an additional opportunity for feedback before the formal consultation and submission process begins.

The MDBA will continue to undertake further work to improve its understanding of the social and economic impacts of the proposed SDLs until the proposed Basin Plan is released. Once the proposed Basin Plan has been released there will be further

**Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts  
Legislation Committee**

Answers to questions on notice

**Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts portfolio**

Budget Estimates, May 2010

opportunities for individuals and communities to make submissions on the proposed SDLs.

The proposed Basin Plan will also include temporary diversion provisions which may assist the community in making the transition to the new SDLs, where this is determined to be necessary.

Further, Section 43A of the *Water Act 2007* requires that, following public consultation on the proposed Basin Plan, the MDBA provide advice to the Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council on the likely socio-economic implications of any reductions in the proposed long-term average SDLs. After consideration of comments from the Ministerial Council, the proposed Basin Plan will be submitted to the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities for adoption.

2. Water markets will continue to facilitate the movement of water, including trading between States under existing arrangements. The proposed Basin Plan will include trading provisions which will further support the water markets.

**Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts  
Legislation Committee**

Answers to questions on notice

**Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts portfolio**

Budget Estimates, May 2010

<b>Outcome:</b>	4	<b>Question No:</b>	72
<b>Program:</b>	4.1		
<b>Division/Agency:</b>	Murray-Darling Basin Authority		
<b>Topic:</b>	Basin Plan – public meetings		
<b>Hansard Page ECA:</b>	Written Question on Notice		

**Senator JOYCE asked:**

How many public meetings/town hall style, have has the Authority held in rural areas of the basin to explain the plan?

**Answer:**

The Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) has held public information sessions on the Basin Plan in St George, Albury and Goolwa in association with Basin Community Committee meetings since August 2009. The MDBA has also held community information sessions in Moree, Renmark, Shepparton, Toowoomba and Albury in association with regular Authority meetings.

In addition, the MDBA made Basin Plan presentations at community information sessions conducted by the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts in nineteen regional centres between October 2009 and June 2010.

Following the release of the Guide to the proposed Basin Plan on 8 October 2010 a series of community information sessions have been arranged for the following locations:

- Shepparton      12 Oct
- Deniliquin      13 Oct
- Griffith          14 Oct
- Renmark          15 Oct
- Narrabri          20 Oct
- Moree            21 Oct
- St George        21 Oct

**Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts  
Legislation Committee**

Answers to questions on notice

**Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts portfolio**

Budget Estimates, May 2010

- Dalby 22 Oct
- Goondiwindi 22 Oct
- Adelaide 25 Oct
- Murray bridge 26 Oct
- Mildura 27 Oct
- Melbourne 28 Oct
- Albury 29 Oct
- Brisbane 1 Nov
- Sydney 3 Nov
- Forbes 4 Nov
- Dubbo 4 Nov
- Bourke 5 Nov
- Echuca 8 Nov
- Horsham 8 Nov
- Narrandera 9 Nov

**Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts  
Legislation Committee**

Answers to questions on notice

**Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts portfolio**

Budget Estimates, May 2010

<b>Outcome:</b>	4	<b>Question No:</b>	108
<b>Program:</b>	4.1		
<b>Division/Agency:</b>	Murray-Darling Basin Authority		
<b>Topic:</b>	Goulburn-Murray Irrigation System		
<b>Hansard Page ECA:</b>	Written Question on Notice		

**Senator JOYCE asked:**

When will the Government complete the socioeconomic study of the Goulburn Murray Irrigation System?

**Answer:**

The Murray-Darling Basin Authority has not undertaken a specific socioeconomic study in relation to the Goulburn Murray Irrigation System. The Authority commissioned Marsden Jacob Associates to undertake the project 'Economic and Social Profiles and Impact Assessments in the Murray-Darling Basin' which included regional consultations and a telephone survey in the Goulburn-Murray Irrigation District as one component.