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**MURRAY DARLING ASSOCIATION INC.
REGION 9 ORDINARY MEETING
TO BE HELD IN-PERSON OR AUDIO
VISUAL ON THURSDAY,
8 SEPTEMBER 2022 AT 10.00AM**

1 Attendance

1.1 Apologies

2 Introduction and Acknowledgment of Country by Chair Glen Andreazza

3 Declarations of Interest

4 Minutes

4.1 Previous Minutes from MDA Region 9 Meeting on 8 September 2022 (see attached)

5 Reports & Board Minutes

5.1 CEO Report + Website: [CEO Reports](#)

5.2 MDA Board Meetings refer Website: [MDA Board Meetings](#)

6 Presentation/Discussion

Mark Lamb, CEO Murray Darling Association – The Circular Economy

7 Items

7.1 Water Buybacks Concern – See attachment to Agenda (pp 36-38)

7.2 Water Inundation – Stories from the Members of Region 9

8 General Business

9 Next Meeting

MDA Region 9 Meeting on Thursday 24 November 2022

Zoom Details:

<https://griffith-nsw-gov-au.zoom.us/j/81855693417?pwd=UVF4ajFQbXh6bnRLQ2dDWDI0VUswZz09>

Passcode: 862620

Webinar ID: 818 5569 3417



MINUTES

**MURRAY DARLING ASSOCIATION (MDA) INC.
REGION 9 ORDINARY MEETING
HELD IN PERSON/VIA ZOOM THURSDAY, 8 SEP 2022 AT 10.00AM**

PRESENT

Chair Cr Glen Andrezza (Deputy Mayor), GM Brett Stonestreet (Griffith City Council), Mayor Ruth McRae (Murrumbidgee Council), GM John Scarce (Murrumbidgee Council), CEO Mark Lamb, (MDA Via Zoom); Tim Phillips, Communications Officer, (MDA Head Office via Zoom); Bede Spannagle, (Riverina Water via Zoom); Cr Geoff Chapman, (Hay Shire Council via Zoom); Cr Gail Driscoll (Lockhart Shire Council via Zoom); Emily Ford, SDLAM Modernisation Project Officer, DPIE – (In Person), and Kim Burgess, Minute Secretary

1 APOLOGIES

Mayor Doug Curran (Griffith City Council), Paul Maytom, Cr Paul Smith, Leeton Shire Council, GM Jackie Kruger, Joe Burns, Cr Bev Furner (Carrathool Shire Council).

2 INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME

Chair Glen Andrezza welcomed Members and conducted an Acknowledgement of Country.

3 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Nil

4 MINUTES

RECOMMENDED on the motion of Geoff Chapman and Bede Spannagle that the minutes of the previous meeting on 19 May 2022, having first been circulated amongst the members be confirmed.

5.1 CEO'S REPORT

CEO Mark Lamb highlighted some key areas of priority.

The Basin Community Leadership Program (BCLP) has been completed and the funds allocated have been audited and signed off by the applicable funding body, Dept of Agriculture. The MDA Inc is accordingly, due to the successful completion of the program now eligible to an additional tranche of funding. The goal is to keep the program alive and so CEO is discussing the program with industries such as the dairy industry and potential to expand on the program.

The Circular Economy is an ongoing commitment of interest and first part of the project with the CSIRO, including water circulation and waste to energy. Speakers on this topic will present at the upcoming Conference.

Membership to MDA is a key priority and CEO will engage with member Councils but also non-member Councils to assist the drive to membership.

The MDA Conference to commence on 18 September 2022. Mark gave a summary of the activities and lineup that will be occurring in the days of the Conference.

Mark in response to a question from Brett Stonestreet gave a summary of the 'makeup' of the participants in the BCLP. Over 200 participants in the program that covered the entire Basin area, and included Council, public sector and private sector. Mark took over the facilitating from an external facilitator, thus by reducing the cost and providing Mark as CEO of MDA an opportunity to meet and discuss the common goals and values around the river system.

Mark in response to question from John Scarce, the Conference papers are to be distributed in next day or so and will include the Motions forwarded and received by MDA head office.

Chair Glen Andreazza asked of possible Motion to be included in relation to the Water Allocations in light of expected continuing wet conditions and this query/motion to be also directed to the appropriate Water Ministers. Chair also asked whether a letter with the same sentiment could be forwarded by the MDA CEO to the appropriate Water Ministers. Mark reminded that the Region 9 Committee had sent an advocacy request to the MDA CEO regarding questions around the 450GL upwater and then forwarded a MDA representation letter on 23 June 2022 to the appropriate Federal Water Minister. Mark advised a response is being awaited. Minister Plibersek will be attending at the Conference.

Mark reminded that Motions can be passed at Board Meetings and so there is not a need to await AGM meetings.

Chair Glen Andreazza indicated that during the Bush Summit he had the occasion to talk with Minister Plibersek and invite her to return to the area to collaborate on many issues that affect Irrigators, Farmers and Community in this area.

Mark indicated his favourable opinion of the Minister based on observations of the Minister and the Government in the first 100 days, but noted the hard evidence of positive changes really need to be seen.

Chair advised that his conversation and observation that concerns him is that the Government is "wanting to honour their promises around the MDB plan and that to arrive at the 2024 target, if buybacks are required then so be it". Chair reiterated that the triple bottom line is essential to be observed and CEO agreed. CEO added that MDA policy is opposed to buybacks and this topic will likely be raised with the Minister at the Conference.

John Scarce mentioned that he asked question of the Minister at the Bush Summit regarding the low level of the Murrumbidgee River with an answer being that the Burrunjuck Dam has to empty and refill before the possibility of 100% allocation. David added that it is expected to be a wet spring with La Nina still a concern for wetter than normal conditions. Again it is observed by the Members is that there is no risk appetite by the Government.

Brett indicated that the risk has been totally shifted to the Farmers by the current allocation methods and decision time lines for Farmers are affected.

Mark mentioned efforts he made to meet NSW Minister for Water earlier in 2022 but to no avail as the Minister's unavailability/non commitment was evident. Mark advised that the Minister will not be attending the Conference.

5.2 MDA BOARD MEETINGS

MDA Board Meetings 2022 as per the Website are noted.

6 PRESENTATION

Emily Ford, Senior Community & Stakeholder Engagement Officer, Water Infrastructure, Department of Planning & Environment – YCMP and other Projects.

Request will be made to Emily Ford to return to the MDA Region 9 meeting in 2023 for an update on the Yanco Creek Modernisation Project and include:

- The status of the Environmental impact statements
- Monitoring Progress
- Definitions on minimum flows
- Update on information provided in the presentation provided today (copy of presentation attached to these Minutes)

Emily Ford indicated that if there is any matters of interest particular to Region 9 in between these meetings, she will provide some detail to the Region 9 Secretary to distribute to members.

Observation by Brett Stonestreet that the understood 605 GI in water savings to be delivered and is a set target in NSW before June 2024 could feasibly and of most concern, not be achieved, as information that is available suggests that the scale of issues, around funding and construction are too many and the flow on negative effect will be the plan will not be achieved. Thereby equating to likely buybacks in this region and wider spread in the Basin.

Query to Emily from Brett on behalf of Region 9 members; is there an opportunity for Region 9 to have a face-to-face meeting with a Senior Officer from the Department to answer the concerns by Region 9 members regarding the outstanding questions around the matters of funding and milestones perhaps not being achieved to date as part of the plan's objectives as this Region heads towards the June 2024 deadline.

Action: Emily Ford, DPR, indicated that she will put this query forward to her superiors.

Mayor McRae reiterated the ongoing concerns around the statement made by the Minister of 'the Basin Plan will be delivered on time and in full' by June 2024. Over 80GI taken out of the system in this area over time so far, with further projected 7.5GI to 16GI to be withdrawn. Expectations of an adverse effect in response.

Mayor McRae added that the community is positive about moving forward with modernisation projects, to become more efficient and to work with the Departments and Agencies to that end, but it should not mean simply a removal of water, but to ensure best practices equals the best use of the precious resource and should not be a quantifiable amount of water that is removed. Chair Glen Andreazza supported this opinion.

Chair Glen Andreazza queried whether it would be prudent to invite the Federal Minister to an MDA Region 9 meeting. Chair added that we could both ask the Minister whilst she is at the Conference that she attend a Region 9 meeting and also agreed that a formal letter request from the CEO Region 9 would be a way forward to inviting the Minister.

Action: Chair requested MDA CEO to forward a letter to the Federal Minister for Water to invite her to meeting with Region 9 members (Councils within Region 9). CEO Mark added that a letter may include the on ground attendance for a meeting and include other Regions.

Appreciation from Chair for Emily Fords' attendance in person and presentation to the Members, supported by Mayor McRae and Members.

Chair noted that many of the points raised by Emily today were issues and matters that were well considered and understood by Mayor McRae and GM John Scarce, being particular matters in the Murrumbidgee LGA.

7 ITEMS

7.1 YANCO CREEK MODERNISATION PROJECT (YMCP)

This item was included from previous meetings as an ongoing matter.

This item today was covered in the above presentation.

7.2 CONCERN OVER THE CURRENT WATER ALLOCATION FIGURES – CHAIR GLEN ANDREAZZA

Chair Glen Andreazza put to the members the need to ask for a response from the Minister on the concerns over allocations and negative effect to crop plantings; that if the allocation figure is not provided until late in the year, then the opportunity to plant crops is lost for the season.

John Scarce added that perhaps it should be a demand for a change in the formulae used by Governments to determine allocations, and rather utilising the BOM information and all other data available, as well as importantly risk assessment which all combined could make for a different outcome in allocations.

The Members agreed that a Motion be prepared today and forwarded to the MDA CEO today for inclusion in the upcoming Conference, with the Motion to indicate concerns around allocations and the methods currently used to determine those allocations.

Action: Members in attendance today will gather post meeting to draft a Motion to be submitted for inclusion in the upcoming Conference for consideration. Motion will follow a format template provided by MDA head office to assist in the inclusion of the rationale and context behind the Motion.

Query by Geoff Chapman that perhaps at this stage the message should be taken outside the Conference and so direct action to the Ministers. Chair Glen reiterated that there will be two approaches, so that a Motion will with success gain support at the Conference but also a letter will be forwarded to the Minister to present the allocation concerns for the Murrumbidgee.

Brett indicated thoughts around whether it may be too short a timing to have a successful well informed Motion.

Mayor McRae then provided her consideration of a preliminary Motion: *That Region 9 seeks clarification in its endeavours to understand the methodologies to determine water allocations. Furthermore the timing of water allocations, adjustments and timing according to agricultural activities.*

This preliminary wording received support in principle from the Members as it in the first instance asks questions and seeks information on the current status of allocations. It is from there that further action by Region 9 can be taken which may be through direct action to the appropriate Ministers or further Conference Motions or representations. This wording will be discussed further post meeting to then arrive at a Motion statement.

RESOLVED on the motion of Mayor Ruth McRae, GM John Scarce, Murrumbidgee Council and Cr Geoff Chapman, Hay Shire Council that a Motion utilising the above preliminary content for the Motion, be finalised today and then submitted today to the CEO MDA for inclusion in the upcoming MDA Conference in Albury. (Refer to Final Motion attached to these Minutes).

Chair Glen Andreazza asked CEO MDA to forward a letter to the State Water Minister to indicate the Region 9 Members' concerns and dissatisfaction regarding lower than expected water allocation for Irrigators, particularly taking account of the recent wet weather and river flows. Concern is also highlighted around the late timing of announcements of water allocations, which adversely affects the business and seasonal decisions of Irrigators and Farmers.

Action: CEO MDA to draft letter to State Water Minister to reflect the above.

8 GENERAL BUSINESS

Reminder to all to register to the MDA Conference to commence next week.

9. NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is to be held 24 November May 2022 at 10am. That meeting will be open to all Members to attend in-person if they wish to do so. Otherwise a Zoom link will be made available to those that would prefer that way of joining the meeting.

Close 12.20pm

Motion Template

Motion # Region # 9 - [Proposing Council is Murrumbidgee Council]

At the MDA Region 9 Meeting on Thursday 8 September, the following Resolution was carried following a Motion by Mayor Ruth McRae, Murrumbidgee Council and Seconded by Cr Geoff Chapman, Hay Shire Council.

Motion: That the Murray Darling Association write to the NSW Minister for Water seeking clarification as to the methodology used to determine annual water allocations in NSW and variations to these allocations during the year. The timing of these water allocation decisions and adjustments are not currently aligned with critical business investment decisions made by the diverse agricultural sector.

Objective:

- *What is your motion trying to achieve?*
Trying to achieve transparency and an understanding in water allocations and gauge some surety for agricultural investment decisions.
- *Who would benefit from your motion?*
The whole region including the triple bottom line framework of economic, social and environmental considerations.

Key Arguments:

- *What is the current context/issue?*
Concerned local government areas that rely on water allocations.
- *What are the risks of this motion doesn't get up?*
There will continue to be a lack of transparency in terms of water allocation decisions and perpetuate negative impacts on communities.
- *What is the broader benefit to Basin communities if this motion is successful?*
Clarification in the methodology would bring about an understanding of water allocation decision making.





Yanco Creek Modernisation Project



Community and Stakeholder Update

Matt Kendall – Principal Project Manager, Murrumbidgee SDLAM
Project Manager, Yanco Creek Modernisation Project
Project Manager, Yanga National Park Project

September 2022

Acknowledgement of Country

The Yanco Creek system commences in the traditional lands of the Wiradjuri people and flows through Bangerang, Yorta Yorta, Barapa Barapa and Wamba Wamba traditional country.

The Project footprint boundaries lie within the four Local Aboriginal Lands Councils of Leeton, Narrandera, Cummeragunja and Deniliquin.

‘Yanggu’ is Wiradjuri for ‘song of running water’.

We are committed to working with Aboriginal communities whilst achieving the aims of the Yanco Creek Modernisation Project.



Nikita Ridgeway

Contents



NSW SDLAM Acceleration Program

Objectives overview

Outcome overview

Yanco Creek Modernisation Project Update

Project overview

Project activities

Project timeline

Environmental impact assessment update

Design and approvals

Progress update

Billabong Creek

Concept designs

Reconnecting River Country

What is the program?

Where is the program at?

Next steps for the program

Better Bidgee Update

Program background and scope

Program update

Closing

YCMP next steps

Q&A

Contact Us

1

NSW SDLAM Acceleration Program

Water Infrastructure NSW

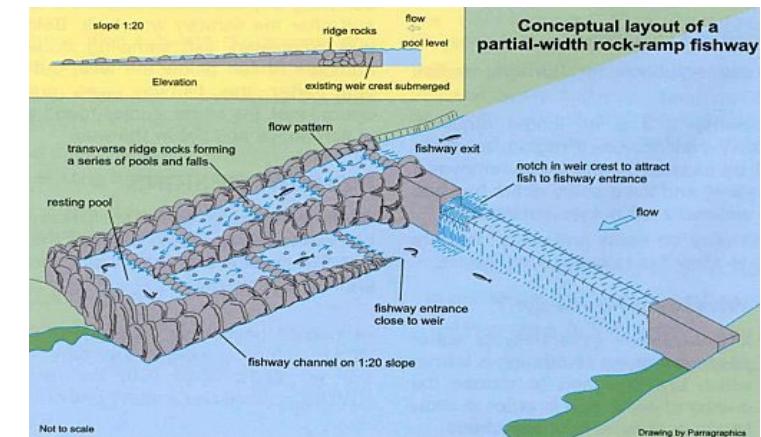
Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment Mechanism (SDLAM) Overview

The purpose of the SDLAM program-of-works is to:

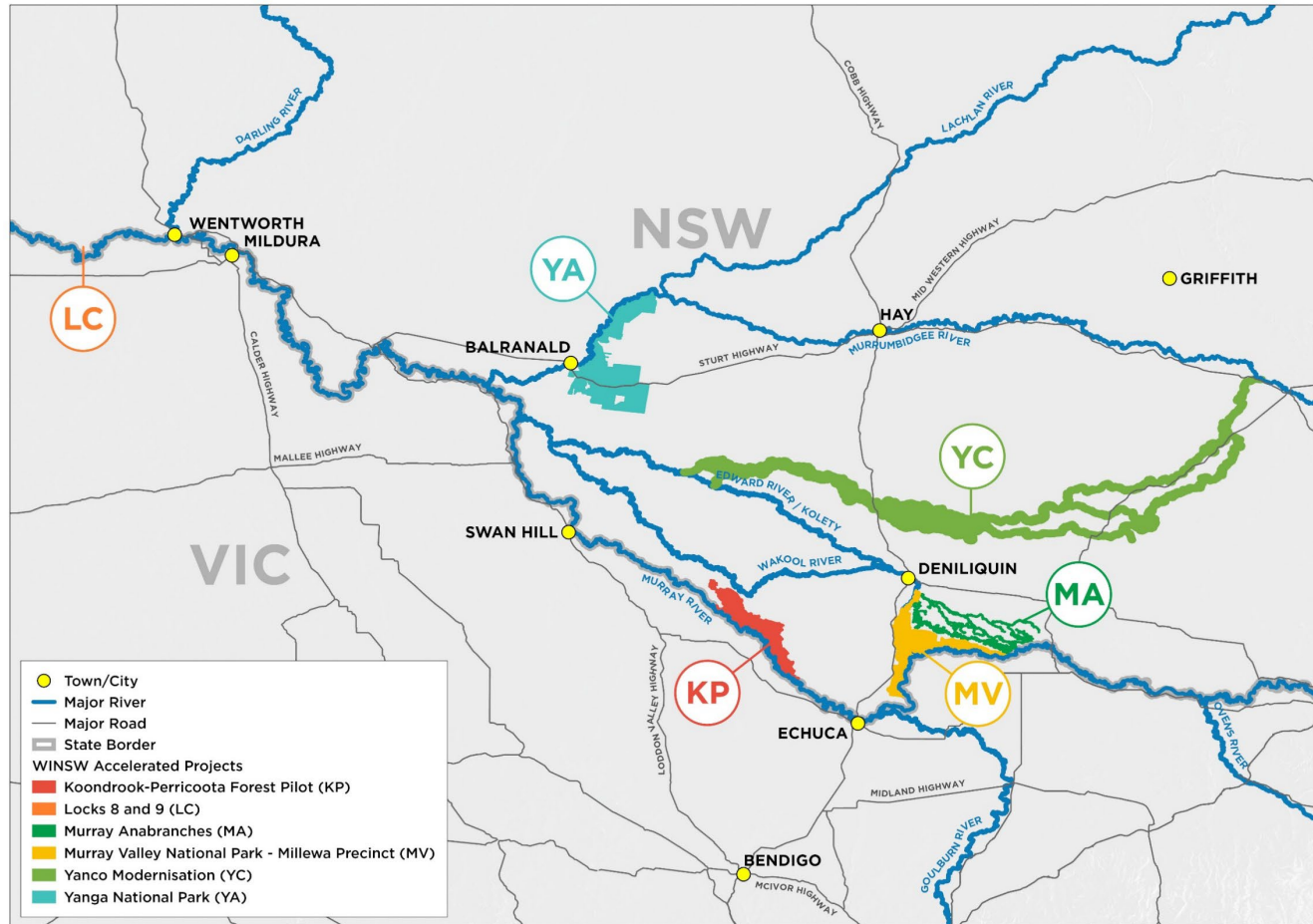
- achieve similar or better environmental outcomes for rivers, wetlands and wildlife using the same or less water;
- and meet NSW commitments under the Basin Plan 2012 but with less impact to local communities ("no more buybacks").

This will be achieved by including:

- smarter use of available water;
- replacing ageing infrastructure with new technology;
- Reducing the need for additional water market purchases from irrigators;
- and avoiding adverse socio-economic outcomes.



SDLAM Objectives and Progress



The Yanco Creek Modernisation Project will keep the Yanco, Billabong, Colombo, and Forest Creeks flowing, and improve fish passage and habitats.

NSW continues to make progress on our active SDLAM projects. All of our acceleration projects will have commenced some construction before the end of 2022 and we are anticipating several large tenders to be released as well. Community support for these projects remains strong and NSW is committed to delivering as much as we can by 2024.

However, we need more time to deliver all of our SDLAM commitments to provide stronger Basin Plan outcomes, improve river health and provide economic stimulus to our regions. This is not just NSW's opinion; several recent independent reviews and our communities are telling us the same thing.

NSW is working with the Australian Government to find a path to address timeframe challenges, especially in light of recent flooding, COVID-19 impacts and global supply chain and resourcing challenges.

2



Yanco Creek Modernisation Project Update

Water Infrastructure NSW

Yanco Creek Modernisation Project Overview

Project Objective

Modernising infrastructure to enable smarter use of water and environmental restoration in the Yanco Creek system – including Yanco, Billabong, Colombo, Forest Creeks.

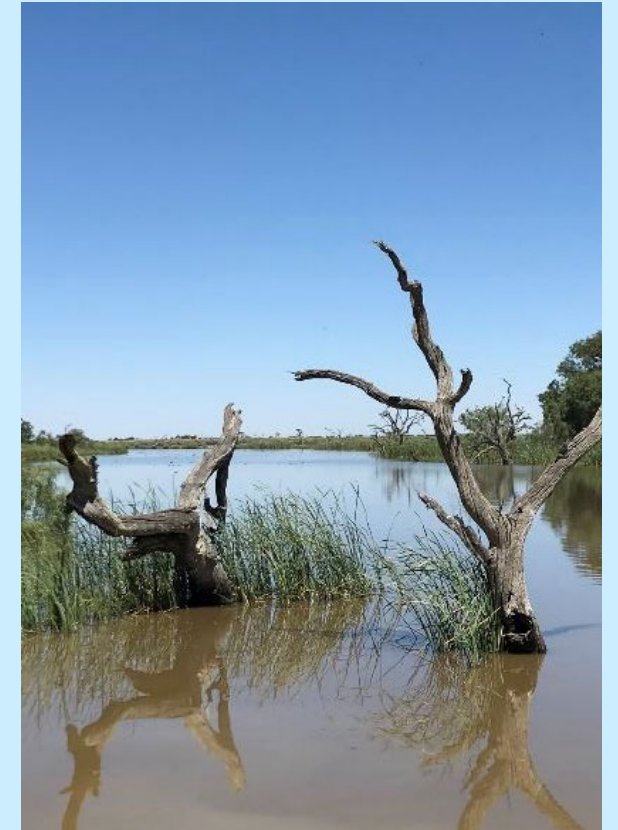
Project Focus

Working hand in hand with local communities to:

- maintain and improve flows;
- keep the Yanco Creek system flowing;
- smarter use of available water;
- modernise ageing infrastructure;
- ensure town water supplies are secure;
- and improve environmental outcomes.

Project Process

- Collaborate with community in project design
- 50+ projects identified and assessed
- Priority list of 8 possible projects – preferred option
- Work together – a community and government partnership

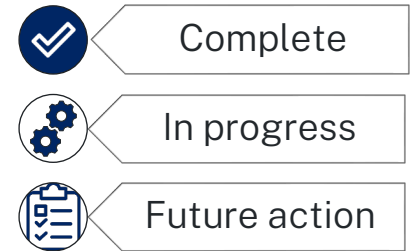
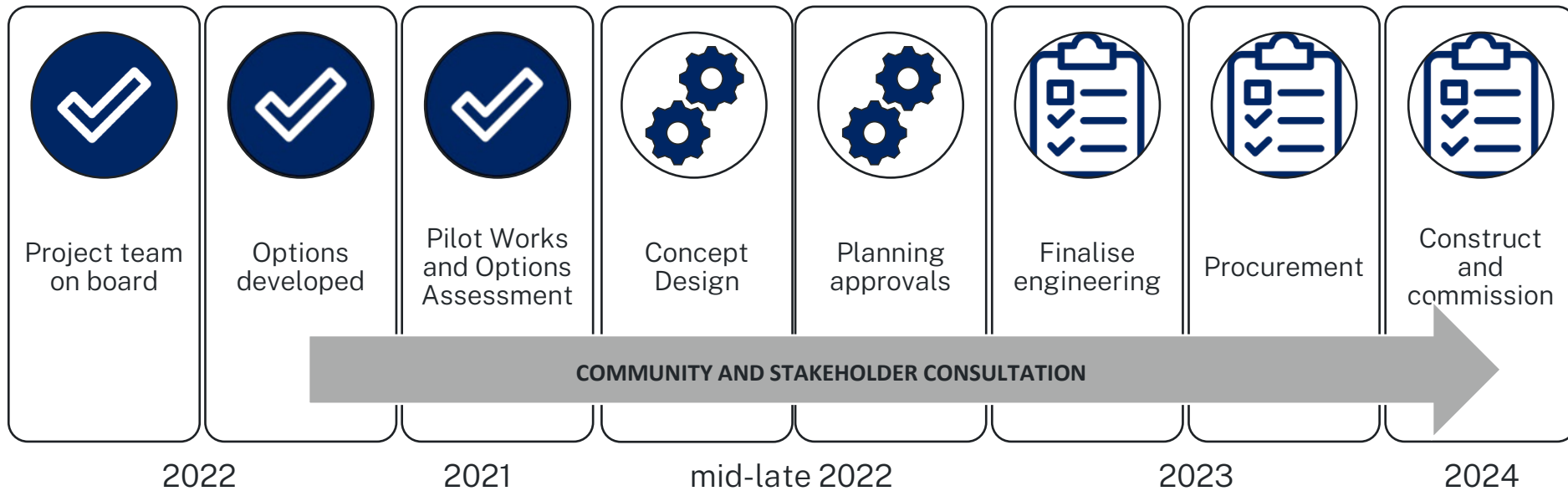


Yanco Creek Modernisation Project Activities



Part	Purpose
1. Environmental water efficiency	Works and measures to provide more efficient delivery of environmental water at three high environmental value locations – Upper Yanco Wetlands (1a), Wanganella Swamp (1b), Lower Forest Anabranh environmental pumps (1c)
2. Billabong Creek environmental water regulators	Upgrade ageing fixed crest weirs with new automated infrastructure to improve irrigation and environmental water delivery. Construct modern environmental water regulators and fish ladders at up to four locations - Locations: Hartwood regulator (2a), Piccaninny regulator (2b), Wanganella regulator (2c), Caroonboon regulator (2d)
3. Yanco/Mundoora/Wilsons Anabranh improvements	Investigate and improve environmental water delivery arrangements at the Yanco Creek / Mundoora /Wilsons Anabranh area.
4. Forest Creek return flows via Piccaninny Creek	Replace the existing Piccaninny Creek Offtake with a new fit-for-purpose regulator (including flow measurement) and access arrangements to reduce unplanned flows in regulated section of the Forest Creek at Warriston Weir.
5. Improved flow measurement	To provide new and/or improved flow measurement throughout the Yanco Creek System to provide Water NSW river operators with additional and more timely information to assist them operate the system more efficiently.
6. Review of irrigation escapes flows	Review the use of existing Murray Irrigation Limited (MIL) and Coleambally Irrigation Co-operative Limited (CICL) escapes in a way that best provides a balance between technical, social, environmental, cultural and economic impacts.
7. Improved use of technology	Improved delivery of irrigation and environmental water using technology to improve the operational efficiency of the Yanco Creek System, including integration with the WaterNSW Computer Aided River Model (CARM)
8. Improved riparian management	Improved riparian management consistent with the project objectives to enhance, refine and/or support the other seven parts of the preferred option. This may include for example removing flow constraints, improving fish passage (i.e weir removal, fish ladders), installing fish screens on pumps, improving fish habitat (i.e re-snagging), fencing and alternative stock watering along priority sections of the system.

Yanco Creek Modernisation Project Timeline



Yanco Creek Modernisation Project Timeline



- Project team on Board – Water Infrastructure NSW, 3 Rivers Partnership (GHD, Jacobs), Stakeholder and Technical Advisory Groups
- Engagement with the community has begun and will continue throughout the project
 - Regular ongoing 1-1 consultation with individual landholders
 - Stakeholder advisory group meeting every 1-2 months
 - Community drop-in sessions every 6 months
 - Registered Aboriginal parties (RAPs) – 11 organisations/individuals
 - Presentations available on request e.g. YACTAC AGM, Council meetings, etc.
- From an original list of 50+ options, preferred option with 8 “project parts” for the Modernisation Project shortlisted
- Yanco Creek systems operations plan has been drafted regarding operating rules for new infrastructure
- Engineering concept designs drafted, and planning approvals (environmental and cultural) commenced
- WINSW and 3Rivers have been working to confirm the required planning approvals pathways – based on feedback from Commonwealth the Part 2 Billabong Ck environmental regulators will have an Environmental Impacts Statement (EIS). Approvals for other parts will be Review of Environmental Factors (REFs).
- Discussions commenced and progressing with landholders re land access, easements, acquisition for infrastructure sites and power / access routes

Environmental Impact Assessment Update

- Environmental impact assessments have commenced on all projects and field surveys are continuing.
- Early surveys for Aboriginal cultural heritage, terrestrial biodiversity and geomorphology commenced based on indicative impact areas.
- Terrestrial biodiversity field surveys have covered all sites. Targeted and seasonal surveys are required at the Billabong Creek environmental water regulator sites and will be undertaken.
- Field survey results are being used to modify designs and access routes to avoid or minimise impacts.
- Outputs from the modelling of potential changes to stream flows are now available and will be assessed for any changes that may impact the environment.
- The Billabong Creek Environmental Water Regulators (Part 2) will require an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The scoping report for the EIS has been completed and will be submitted to DPE Planning for review.
- The current proposed planning pathway is a Review of Environmental Factors (REF) for multiple projects.



Design & Approvals

- Draft concept designs have been prepared and were provided to stakeholders for review, comment and feedback via the Design Focus Group.
- The Design Focus Group met in Albury in June 2022 to review and finalise the draft concept designs, focussing on:
 - Environmental water efficiency.
 - Billabong Creek environmental water regulators.
 - Forest Creek return flows via Piccaninny Creek.
 - Part b Cheverells Creek Offtake.
- Concept designs have been submitted to the Design Focus Group for feedback by September 22, focusing on:
 - Mundoora Anabranh reconfiguration.
 - Improved Riparian management – weir removals.
- Costings for whole-of-life-cycle (capital plus operations and maintenance (O&M) estimates) will be updated based on concept designs by (October 22).



Fig 1 – Design Focus Group meeting, Albury, June 2022

Fig 2 – Field Inspection, Billabong Creek, November 2021

Progress - Yanco Creek System Operations Plan

- The draft Yanco Creek System Operations Plan has been drafted in consultation with, and endorsed for consultation by the Yanco Stakeholder and Technical Advisory Groups.
- Feedback is now being sought from interested landholders and organisations, and the broader community.
- The plan outlines, among other items:
 - Operating principles & objectives
 - River operations overview
 - Draft rules for current and proposed infrastructure
 - Proposed new regulator operations (levels and rates of rise/fall)
 - Use of irrigation escape flows
 - Proposed minimum flow targets - reach by reach.



Billabong Creek at existing Hartwood Weir

Progress - Yanco Creek System Operations Plan

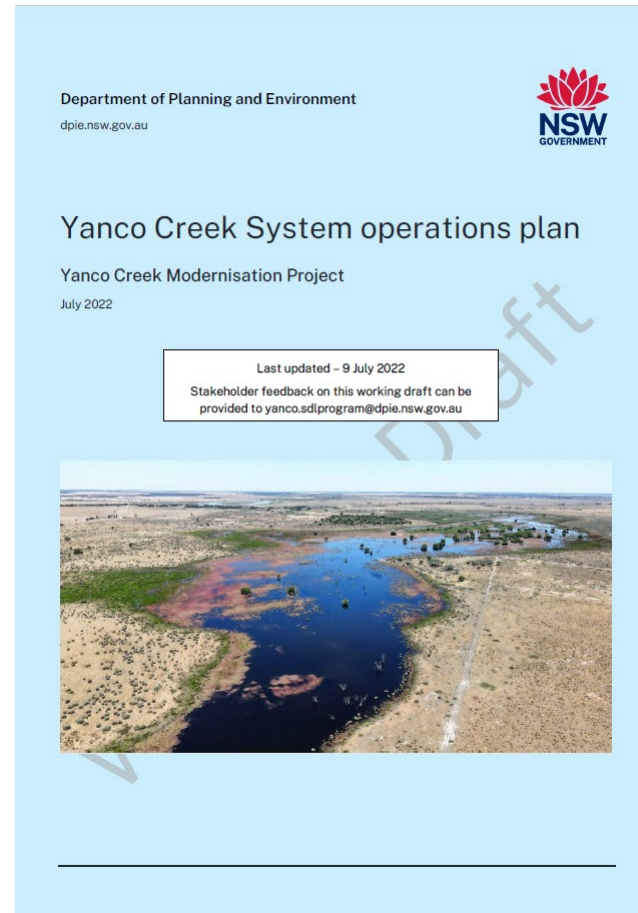
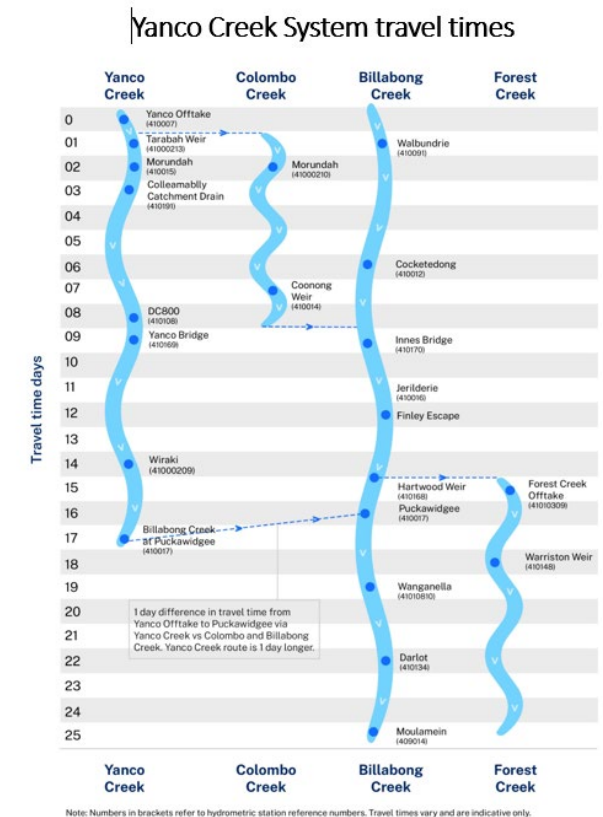
Key considerations for the operations plan include:

- A difficult system to operate, encountering
 - long travel times;
 - limited ability to increase or reduce flow rates to match delivery requirements.
- A need for transparency, so everyone is clear about operating principles, objectives and rules.

A summary document is available to review today.

To request a copy of the full version (80 pages), please email yanco.sdlprogam@dpie.nsw.gov.au or phone 1300 081 047.

Feedback on the operations plan is expected by 21 October 2022.

Progress – Improved Flow Monitoring

We are close to finalising a funding agreement with WaterNSW for proposed new and upgraded hydrometric flow measurement stations. The locations of the stations are:

- Undetermined location downstream of Spillers Regulator (new site located north of Morundah)
- Billabong Creek @ Cocketgedong (possible water quality upgrade to existing site located upstream of Billabong Creek junction with Colombo Creek)
- Billabong Creek @ Old Coree (new site located upstream of Finely Escape)
- Yanco Creek @ Moonyanco (new site located upstream of Yanco Creek junction with Billabong Creek)
- Billabong Creek @ 10 Mile Reserve (new site located about 15km north east of Moulamein)

The proposed sites must pass suitability investigations prior to approval for construction.



Hydrometric flow measurement site suitability investigations

Progress – Access track upgrades



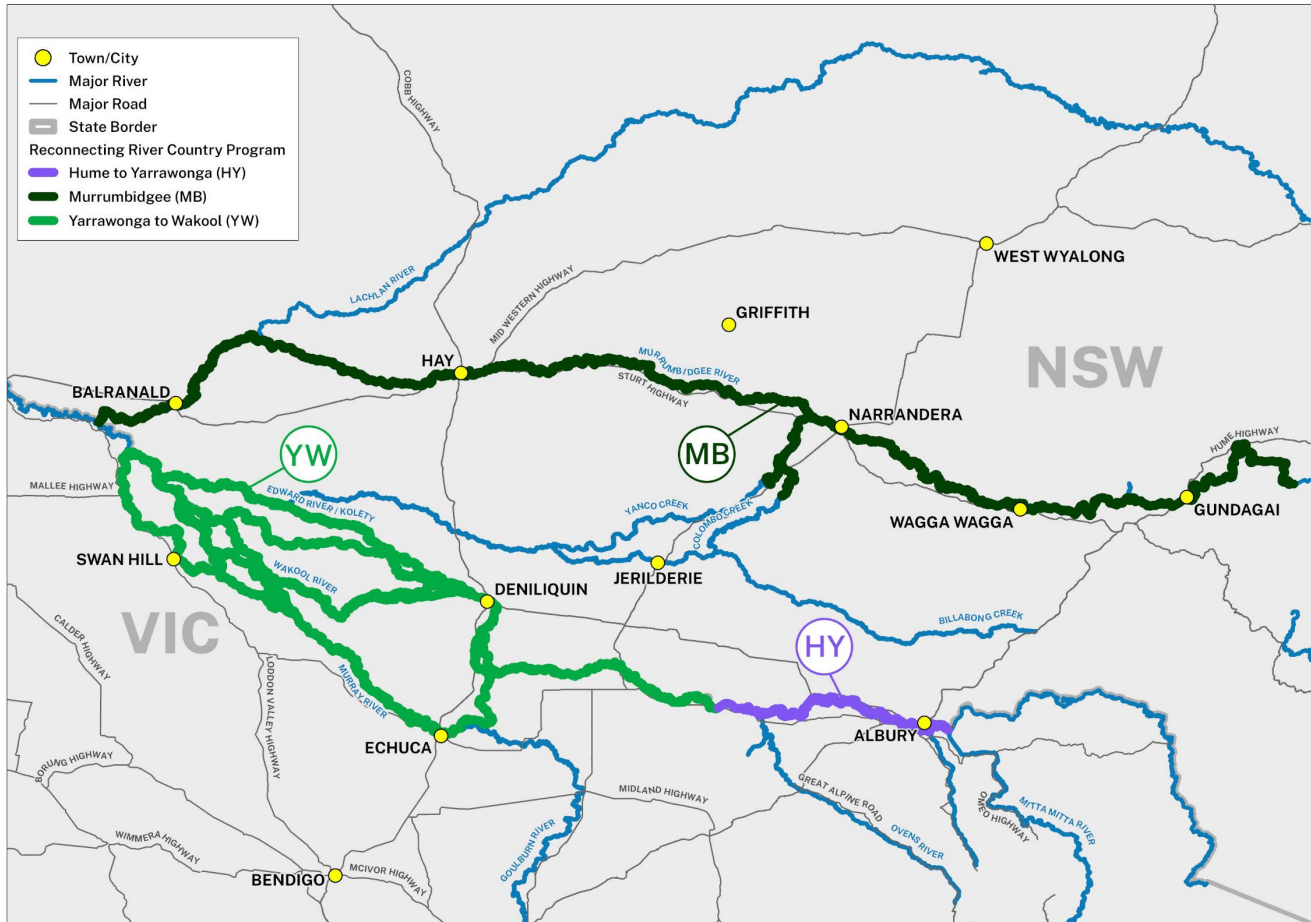
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Reconnecting River Country

Water Infrastructure NSW

What is Reconnecting River Country Program?

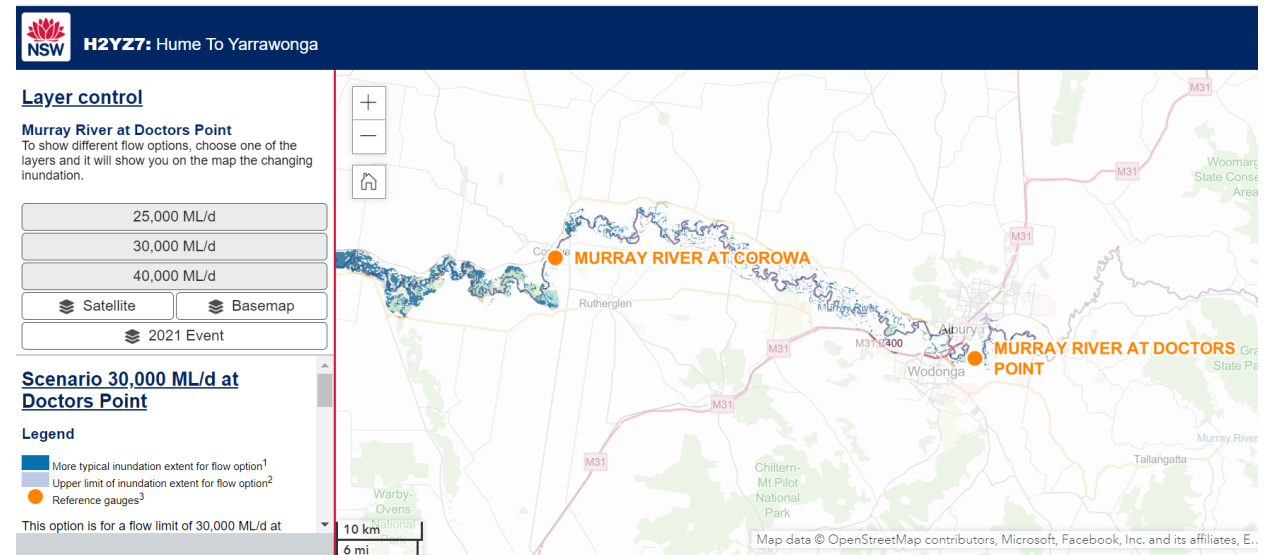


- NSW SDLAM supply and constraints projects:
 - Hume to Yarrowonga
 - Yarrowonga to Wakool
 - Murrumbidgee
- The program reinforces the NSW’s commitment to Basin Plan outcomes:
 - local environmental and community benefits,
 - balanced economic, social, cultural and environmental outcomes across Southern NSW
 - improved wetland health and floodplain connectivity
- The program focuses on removing constraints that impact the delivery of water for the environment across the southern-connected Murray–Darling.

Where is the program at?

- Strategic business case (SBC) phase for the Murray and Murrumbidgee:
 - Murray SBC – completed.
 - Murrumbidgee SBC – due September 2022.
- Information released to stakeholders to gain their input and update on progress:
 - Online inundation mapping across the program area derived from comprehensive hydraulic modelling.
 - Frequency, timing and duration of flow options under investigation.
 - Environmental benefits assessments findings.
 - Landholder Negotiation Framework, ‘What You Said, What We Did’ Report (August 2022).

- Engaging stakeholders to seek feedback on key information, through:
 - Regional Focus Groups and Peak Body Groups
 - Existing private landholder case studies
 - First Nations Groups and On-Country assessments
 - Community snapshots
 - Online case studies (new and open to applications).



Next Steps for Reconnecting River Country

- We will be reaching out to landholders, First Nations Peoples, public land managers and the regional community to:
 - start discussions and seek feedback on flow options and their frequency, timing and duration;
 - continue conversations about environmental and property-scale impacts and benefits, inundation mapping and appropriate mitigations;
 - and discuss the feedback received on the proposed Landholder Negotiation Framework and Impact Management Toolbox.
- Continuing development of the Landholder Negotiation Framework and Impact Management Toolbox.
- Refinement of inundation mapping through on-ground validation.

For the latest Program information and to sign up for an online case study, visit <https://caportal.com.au/dpe/rcc>



4

Better Bidgee Project

Water Infrastructure NSW

Better Bidgee Program Background & Scope

In April 2021 Ministerial Council agreed to NSW rescoping the Menindee Lakes and Yanco Offtake projects.

This was driven by significant community concerns around:

- ecological outcomes
- reduced amenity
- impacts on traditional owners
- lack of community support

NSW went back to basics and took a system-wide approach to address the needs of Darling-Baaka and Murrumbidgee systems rather than delivering narrowly modelled outcomes.

The Better Bidgee Program was announced on the 22nd October 2021.

Better Bidgee Program Elements:

- Revised Yanco Offtake
- Reconnecting the Bidgee – Fish Passage
- Addressing cold water pollution
- Fish Friend Water Extraction
- Gooragool / Mantangary Lagoon
- Balranald Weir/Yanga Lake
- Restoring the Bidgee Program
- Local Roads and Employment Package



Beter Bidgee Program Update



- Better Bidgee scope and status remains unchanged since March 2022.
- To continue to progress, NSW needs additional Commonwealth funding to further scope these projects and with community and understand their likely contribution to Basin Plan outcomes.
- We are continuing conversations with the Commonwealth Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water to seek this funding.
- A funding milestone business case was prepared for work conducted prior to the announcement of the Better Bidgee.
- Note: This is not a business case for future works and was a requirement of previous funding arrangements.

Funding Milestone Business Case

The Funding Milestone Business Case is an instrument used to claim expenses for work done on the Yanco Offtake prior to the announcement of the Better Bidgee Program.

The Milestone Business Case:

- Highlights that further funding is required to develop a Better Bidgee business case;
- and recommends funding to develop a Yanco Offtake Business Case.

5

Closing

Water Infrastructure NSW

Next Steps

-
- Aboriginal cultural heritage assessment field surveys in October
 - Terrestrial biodiversity targeted and seasonal surveys – next survey is late September
 - Commence biodiversity impact assessment for other sites
 - Commence other specialist EIS assessments, including detailed assessments of stream hydrology, flooding, groundwater, aquatic biodiversity, historic heritage and social impacts
 - First draft of the EIS for completion in April 2023, for public exhibition of the final EIS in mid-2023
 - Prepare impact assessment reports for other projects for WINSW's approval – from October to December
 - Design focus group endorsement of concept design (1, 2, 4, 5b)
 - Design focus group review and finalisation of concept design (3,8) for endorsement
 - Progress to detailed design - incorporate outcomes from:
 - environmental assessment
 - cultural heritage assessment
 - landowner consultation
 - further geotechnical assessment
 - further topographic survey
 - modelling results.

Q & A



Contact Us



Matt Kendall

Principal Project Manager – 0437 389 030

David Lloyd / Nicola Bailey

Project Coordinator 3Rivers/GHD – 02 6239 7234
/ 0401 246 176

David Clarke

Senior Project Officer – 0429 609 793

Edward (Eddie) Whyman

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Politics Federal Murray-Darling Basin

Water buybacks remain on agenda to protect Murray-Darling Basin: Plibersek



Shane Wright

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Buybacks and infrastructure to improve farming efficiency will be central to the federal government's plans to provide more water to the environment across the Murray-Darling Basin, Environment and Water Minister Tanya Plibersek has confirmed.

Plibersek, speaking to Sky News on Sunday, said even though much of south-east Australia was enduring floods at present, there would be future droughts that would strain basin communities, which would require access to environmental water flows.



Tanya Plibersek says water buybacks remain on the government agenda, arguing they will help communities in future droughts. KATE GERAGHTY

An independent review, commissioned by the federal government and released in August, found a \$1.8 billion fund to restore the health of the Murray-Darling system is failing due to rule changes championed by the Nationals in 2018 to block farmers from selling their irrigation rights.

The \$1.8 billion was aimed at recovering 450 gigalitres of water, about the volume of Sydney Harbour, through voluntary water efficiency projects by private irrigators. It set a June 30, 2024 deadline for water recovery, which falls within this term of government.

But Plibersek said the previous government was never really committed to the fund, with just two gigalitres of water saved.

She said water buybacks had to be on the agenda, especially as some farmers were voluntarily approaching the government to sell their water.

“It’s really important that buybacks are on the table, we’ll continue to look at other infrastructure projects to reduce demand on water across the Murray-Darling Basin,” she said.

“If there are unproductive areas of irrigation networks that irrigators want to close down or retire, we’ll look at proposals like that.”

Plibersek said the National Party appeared opposed to allowing farmers to sell to the government but happy for them to sell rights to anyone else.

In 2019, Public Sector Pension Investment Board (PSP Investments), one of Canada’s largest fund managers, bought a huge parcel of Australian permanent water rights for \$490 million to irrigate almond trees in Victoria’s Sunraysia district.

“I always think that it’s extraordinary that the National Party think it’s fine for farmers to sell their water to big state-owned enterprises from overseas, to the Canadian teachers’ pension fund ... anybody overseas, but their own farmers aren’t allowed to sell their water back to the Australian government to be used for the environment to benefit all Australians,” she said.

Opponents of water buybacks argue that in some cases, regional communities built around irrigation will be left without a vital industry.

Plibersek said environmental water was also important to regional communities that will face drought in the future, arguing they helped the economy and lifted “the mood” of rural towns.

“We know we need to do this right now because implementing these changes will take years and we know Australia will have another drought cycle in the future,” she said.

“We know that the environmental water that was released during the end of the last drought actually literally saved towns.

“If we are going to be able to do that in the future when there are droughts then we need to achieve the targets set out in the Murray-Darling Basin Plan.”

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Information gleaned, provided and opinion by TerraAg in November 2022:

Last week the Federal Government, in agreement with State ministers, announced it would be purchasing 50GL from the basin in order to meet its first obligation and election commitment on this point – “Bridging the Gap”

➤ The buy-back is specific to areas of the basin where recoveries were not quite met during the last round of physical purchases from the government at the time, these areas of the basin include:

- * 14GL from the Condamine-Balonne
- * 1.6GL in the Barwon-Darling
- * 9.5GL in the Namoi
- * 5.1GL in the NSW border rivers
- * 0.9GL in the Lachlan
- * 10GL in the NSW Murray
- * 4.9 GL from the ACT

The balance will be groundwater purchased from the Condamine Alluvium in Qld.

- So far the government is yet to formalise how they will approach these areas to secure entitlements, and in the case of NSW Murray what balance of water will be above or below choke? And balance between High Security and General Security. More details will be provided in February at the next meeting between Water Ministers
- Federal Minister Plibersek has also noted that previous parties who expressed interest in selling entitlements may also be privately approached for discussion/negotiations during this time

On face value, these volumes do not present a material purchase in consideration to the volume of entitlements on issue (1,400,000ML G/S on issue in the NSW Murray for example) and as such a high number of participation from entitlement owners is very unlikely in order to achieve the volumes required