



Australian Government



FACT SHEET

Basin Plan implementation pathway process

Key messages

- The Basin Plan will only be implemented successfully with all governments, agencies and communities working together.
- MDBA and state, territory and Commonwealth ministers agree that an adaptive management approach to the Basin Plan will achieve the best outcomes.
- Initial numbers reflect our current knowledge; adaptive management will allow adjustments as more information or works and measures inform the process.
- A 'take stock' step in 2015 may adjust the SDLs.
- Ministers have agreed that SDLs in the Basin Plan should not be enforced until 2019.
- The 2019 commencement date will give communities time to adjust to the new arrangements; and for the Commonwealth to meet its commitment to bridging the gap.
- State water resource plans will be the main way that Basin Plan settings will be carried out at the catchment level.

An adaptive management approach allows for local engagement in the process and for regions to take some responsibility for managing water to achieve the SDLs.

It also allows us to keep adjusting the SDLs if water savings have been made through works and measures or improved processes.

The Murray–Darling Basin Authority is responsible for managing the Basin's water resources in the national interest. This includes preparing and overseeing a legally-enforceable management plan – the Basin Plan. While the Basin Plan will set and enforce environmentally sustainable limits on the quantities of water that may be taken from Basin water resources, the operational arrangements will be formalised through State government water resource plans. To give states (and communities) time to prepare and adjust, the sustainable diversion limits in the Basin Plan will not be enforceable until 2019. Over the next seven years, a pathway process, with opportunities for consultation and adaptive management, will operate.

The pathway

The draft Basin Plan includes sustainable diversion limit (SDL) numbers that reflect our current knowledge – from extensive research, consultation, advice and computer modelling. However, finer-scale research is necessary and ongoing, methods are continually being refined, various state initiatives, works and measures, policy changes and the activities of the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder (CEWH) all affect the amount of water recovered to meet the SDLs.

For this reason, a seven year pathway towards achieving and enforcing the SDLs will commence from the release of the draft Basin Plan. This will start with negotiations with state ministers – with adoption to occur in 2012 subject to passage by the Commonwealth parliament. During this period and the ensuing three years, we will work with the states, peak bodies and local communities on a number of fronts. Activities that will occur include:

1. Further research – to improve our knowledge of environmental water needs and social and economic impacts at a finer scale; and to find more efficient ways of delivering water.
2. The MDBA will deliver the Environmental Watering Plan (EWP) and the Water Quality and Salinity Management Plan (both requirements of the Water Act). Together, these identify causes of degradation and

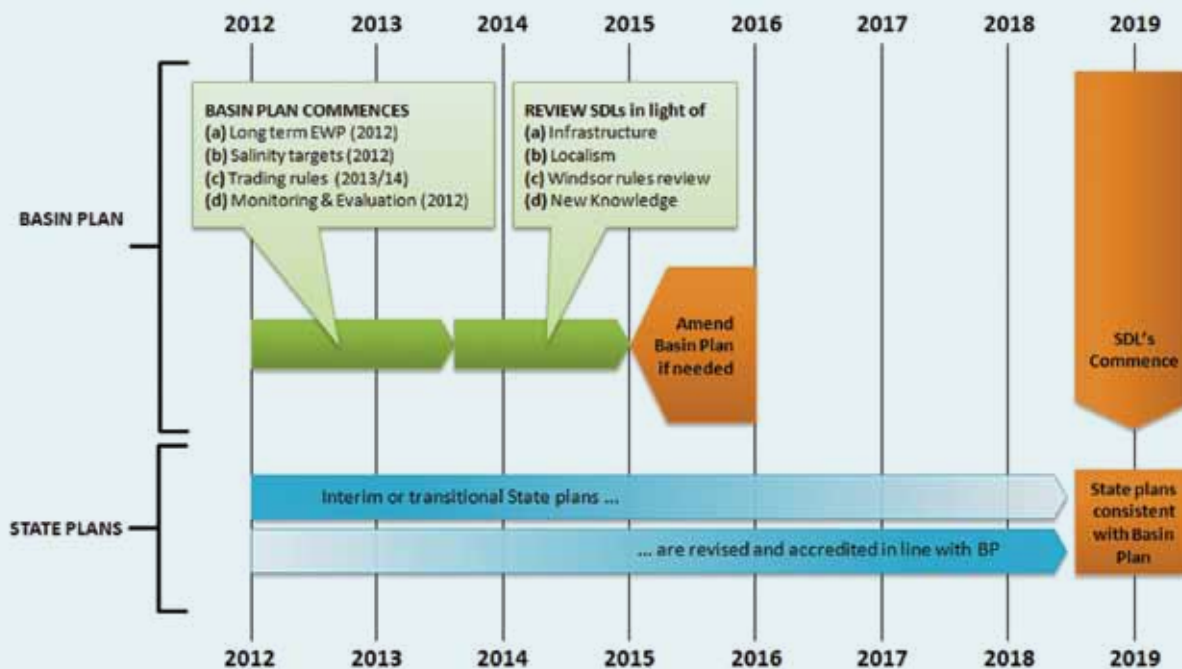


Figure 1: The Basin Plan pathway

A water resource plan (WRP) is a legally-enforceable instrument that defines the allowable level of water diversion from a defined water resource.

A WRP must comply with the Basin Plan and sets out the arrangements for sharing the water available for consumptive use among competing users over a specified timeframe.

To be effective, a WRP should establish rules to meet environmental objectives and take account of potential and emerging threats to the resource, such as climate change.

the environmental assets to be protected, set the overall environmental objectives, and specify targets to be achieved and by which to measure progress.

3. States will progressively develop new water resource plans which will align the sustainable diversion limits with the Basin Plan and the objectives of the EWP. For example, this may include adjusting water trading arrangements and/or river operating rules and incorporate any savings achieved through improved works and measures, practice change or water purchases.
4. Government will work with local and regional communities to share and improve their respective capacities to deliver water reform; building on existing regional structures and understanding perspectives.
5. Regions may adjust the way they use water, eg. introduce local measures that improve either water conservation or environmental outcomes. They may also transition to less water-intensive land use.
6. A program for monitoring and evaluating the Basin Plan's effectiveness will be set up. This evaluation will feed back into refining the Plan.
7. At a 'take stock' point in 2015, the SDLs will be revisited to reflect any water saving initiatives and/or improved estimates of environmental watering needs; and also the effect of Commonwealth and state acquisitions, policy changes or improved processes.
8. By 2019, the state WRPs must be accredited, and the revised SDLs are enforceable.