Australian Government Commonwealth Environmental Water Office

PLANNING AND USE OF COMMONWEALTH ENVIRONMENTAL WATER

Commonwealth environmental water is managed to protect and restore rivers, wetlands and other environmental assets in the Murray–Darling Basin.

Water is recovered for the environment through a combination of investments in water saving infrastructure, water purchases and other water recovery programs.

Environmental water provides more natural flow patterns to the Murray-Darling Basin river system, and this in turn contributes to the wellbeing of regional communities who depend on sustainable water management to support healthy rivers, strong communities and productive economies.

AVAILABLE WATER

Significant rainfall and record flooding has occurred over the last two years in the Murray-Darling Basin. The water storage capacity in the Basin is 95 per cent full.¹

The volume of Commonwealth environmental water available for use in 2012-13 is 1,328 gigalitres (as at 31 October 2012), after considering use limits in some northern catchments.

ENVIRONMENTAL WATER USE DECISIONS

Over 1,327 gigalitres of Commonwealth environmental water has been delivered to catchments within the Murray-Darling Basin between 1 March 2009 and 31 October 2012 (see map on page 4). Commonwealth environmental watering in 2012-13 continues to build on the ecological recovery of riverine and wetland communities following the breaking of the drought and the past two years of wetter conditions. An important focus in the southern Murray-Darling Basin is on achieving environmental outcomes at multiple sites. It is intended that a series of coordinated watering events will aim to maximise the efficient use of environmental water across the southern Basin, within Murray River tributaries (such as the Murrumbidgee and Goulburn Rivers) and along the Murray River to the Lower Lakes and Coorong.

As at 31 October 2012, over 940 gigalitres of Commonwealth environmental water has been made available for delivery in 2012-13 for the Murray-Darling Basin (see table on the following page).

Further decisions on the use and delivery of Commonwealth environmental water will be made throughout 2012-13 based on consideration of environmental needs, the range of options for water use and seasonal, operational and management conditions.

OPTIONS FOR WATER USE

Documents describing the possible Annual water use options in 2012-13, based on the range of possible river conditions that may occur throughout the year, have been developed for catchments of the Murray-Darling Basin where the Commonwealth holds water. For information on local water use options and delivery please refer to:

- Lower Murray River
- <u>Mid-Murray River</u>
- Northern Victorian Rivers
- <u>Murrumbidgee River</u>
- Lachlan River
- <u>Macquarie River</u>
- <u>Namoi River</u>
- Gwydir River
- Queensland and New South Wales Border Rivers
- Northern Murray-Darling Basin Unregulated Rivers

¹ The Murray Darling Basin Authority, viewed 15 November 2012 on <u>Water in storages – Whole of basin</u>





...to protect and restore rivers, wetlands and other environmental assets in the Murray-Darling Basin

COMMONWEALTH ENVIRONMENTAL WATER APPROVED DELIVERY IN 2012–13 (AS AT 31 OCTOBER 2012)

Catchment	GL	Purpose
Murrayı	300	To provide ecological connectivity to support ecosystem functions, maintain/ improve native vegetation communities, encourage spawning and recruitment of native fish, and provide additional flows to the Lower Lakes.
Edward Wakool	64	To provide instream flow pulses in spring and autumn for large and small bodied native fish.
		To create small flows in Tuppal, Jimaringle, Cockran, and Gwynnes Creeks to support in-stream processes and improve the condition of the creeks.
Macquarie	110	To inundate semi-permanent wetland vegetation in the Macquarie Marshes.
Murrumbidgee	196	To deliver an in-channel flow to promote spawning by large-bodied native fish and to promote continued recovery of wetland vegetation communities.
Loddon	2.7	To provide instream flows to improve aquatic habitat, maintain native vegetation and support ecosystem function.
Campaspe	6.8	To provide instream flows to improve aquatic habitat, maintain native vegetation and support ecosystem function and provide return flows to contribute to the lower Murray River.
Goulburn	194.8	To supplement instream flows for the purpose of supporting native fish habitat, ecosystem function and improving vegetation condition and provide return flows to contribute to outcomes in the lower Murray River.
Lower Broken Creek	59	To provide instream flows for improving native fish habitat, movement and recruitment and provide return flows to contribute to the lower Murray River.
Ovens River	0.07	To supplement instream flows to contribute to maintaining aquatic habitat and native vegetation health.
Lachlan	10	To support waterbird breeding in the lower Lachlan system.
Total	943.4	

¹ 21.9 GL has also been approved for use in Gunbower Forest using return flows from upstream actions.

The water use options for each catchment have been developed based on the environmental conditions within the catchment and corresponding ecological objectives (see table below). The objectives seek to ensure appropriate wetting and drying cycles for the wetlands and floodplains of the Basin.

	Environmental conditi	ons within the catch	iment		
	Extreme Dry	Dry	Moderate	Wet	Very Wet
Ecological objectives	Avoid damage to key environmental assets	Ensure ecological capacity for recovery	Maintain ecological health and resilience	Improve the health and resilience of aquatic ecosystems	Build future capacity to support ecological health and resilience



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<u>Factsheets</u> summarising the water use options for each catchment have also been developed.

The options identified for each catchment are not exhaustive and do not represent a commitment for water use. The Commonwealth Environmental Water Office will review, and if appropriate adjust, the water



use options in response to drier or wetter conditions.

PORTFOLIO MANAGEMENT

The broader approach to managing the portfolio of

Commonwealth environmental water holdings is captured in <u>Portfolio management</u> <u>statements</u>. The *Portfolio management statements* are updated regularly throughout the year. The statements provide information on water availability, use decisions, the potential for trade and carryover of Commonwealth environmental water. There is

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no plan to trade Commonwealth environmental water in the short term.

CONSISTENCY WITH BASIN PLAN

The Commonwealth's planning for annual use and management of Commonwealth environmental water in 2012-13 has been undertaken in a manner that is expected to be consistent with the Basin Plan when it is finalised. The Basin Plan contains an environmental watering plan, which establishes a framework for effective planning and coordination of Commonwealth, state and other water holdings for environmental use. The Commonwealth will ensure that its planning and operations are updated as required, once the final Basin Plan is made.

WORKING WITH PARTNERS

The planning for use, management, delivery and monitoring of Commonwealth environmental water is undertaken in partnerships with many stakeholders throughout the Murray–Darling Basin.

In developing the annual water use options for 2012-13, over 25 stakeholder groups had input including Basin state government departments and agencies, river operators, catchment management authorities, local environmental watering advisory groups, the Murray-Darling Basin Authority, and the Commonwealth Environmental Water Scientific Advisory Panel. Wetland managers, holders of environmental water, individual local water users and landholders were also consulted.

The delivery of Commonwealth environmental water is assisted by state government agencies, river operators, irrigation organisations and local landholders. Other holders of environmental water may partner with the Commonwealth in undertaking watering actions.

The Commonwealth Environmental Water Office welcomes further suggestions for water use at any time. Please call 1800 218 478 or send an email to: ewater@environment.gov.au or visit our website www.environment.gov.au/ewater/contacts.

Further Information

Please view our website <u>www.environment.gov.au/</u> <u>ewater</u> for further information on Commonwealth environmental water.

Cover photo: Murrumbidgee River. Photo by Andrew Lowes, CEWO



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COMMONWEALTH ENVIRONMENTAL WATER DELIVERY - 1,327 GIGALITRES DELIVERED TO BASIN CATCHMENTS FROM 1 MARCH 2009 TO 31 OCTOBER 2012



*An additional 185.4GL was also delivered to the Murray from re-credited return flows from upstream Commonwealth watering actions undertaken in Victoria



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