Fact Sheet: Environmental Water Recovery

Environmental water recovery targets for the *Restoring the Balance in the Murray-Darling Basin* program have not yet been set. In the medium term, water purchases will be guided by the findings of Basin-wide scientific studies on water availability and ecosystem health, as well as information on the specific needs of particular environmental assets, and the difference between current levels of use and the sustainable diversion limits, which are expected to be established in 2011.

Prior to the Murray-Darling Basin Authority establishing sustainable diversion limits and the Basin Environmental Watering Plan, the Department will draw on available scientific information on environmental water needs and risks in prioritising purchases. This means that the Government's water purchases will be guided by:

- current information of the volume of water required to maintain or improve environmental values and health;
- estimates of future water availability; and
- the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder's capacity to delivery water for an environmental benefit.

Basin-wide studies such as CSIRO Sustainable Yield Study and the Murray-Darling Basin Commission's (MDBC) Sustainable Rivers Audit are particularly relevant in this regard. The CSIRO Sustainable Yield Study was commissioned following the Murray-Darling Basin Water summit on 7 November 2006. The study set out to apply a robust and consistent method across the Basin, to estimate water availability and demand 20 years into the future in the light of climate change and other risks. The reports for individual catchments within the Basin have been published at: http://www.environment.gov.au/water/mdb/yields.html.

The CSIRO Sustainable Yields Study is complemented by the Sustainable Rivers Audit by the MDBC, which seeks to assess the ecological condition and health of river valleys in the Murray-Darling Basin and eventually determine trends in river health over time. The report for the first phase of the project was released in May 2008 and assessed river health for 2004-07, using fish, hydrology and macroinvertebrates as indicators. The next phase of the audit is due to be completed in 2011. The full report has been published at:
http://www.mdbc.gov.au/SRA/river_health_check_-_sra_report_one.

Table 1 is a summary of findings of the CSIRO Sustainable Yields Study and the MDBC Sustainable Rivers Audit. It shows that most catchments in the Murray-Darling Basin are highly developed and are in poor or very poor health. Under best estimates, the volume of surface water available for the environment and for consumptive use is projected to decline in all catchments by 2030 due to climate change and other factors such as the development of farm dams.

Table 1: Summary of findings of the CSIRO Sustainable Yields Study and MDBC Sustainable Rivers Audit

Catchment	MDBC Sustainable Rivers Audit Health Rating	CSIRO Sustainable Yields Study		
		Historical average surface water availability (GL)	Current Diversions (%)	Forecast decline in surface water availability by 2030 under future development and climate change (GL)
NORTHERN BASIN				
Barwon-Darling	Poor	2088	11%	221
Border Rivers	Moderate	1208	34%	116
Condamine-Balonne	Moderate	1363	52%	114
Gwydir	Poor	782	41%	79
Macquarie-Castlereagh	Very Poor	1567	24%	118
Moonie	Moderate	99	35%	12
Namoi	Poor	965	27%	50
Paroo	Good	445	0%	13
Warrego	Poor	421	12%	28
SOUTHERN BASIN				
Campaspe	Very Poor	275	92%	45
Eastern Mount Lofty Ranges	N/A	120	5%	3
Goulburn-Broken	Very Poor	3233	25%	441
Lachlan	Very Poor	1139	26%	128
Loddon-Avoca	Very Poor	285	89%	51
Murray	Poor – Very Poor	11162	34%	1556
Murrumbidgee	Very Poor	4270	43%	389
Ovens	Poor	1776	1%	233
Wimmera	Very poor	219	31%	46