



Australian Government

# WATER for the FUTURE

## Murray-Darling Basin Authority – Transition

**On 3 July 2008, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) signed an Intergovernmental Agreement on Murray-Darling Basin Reform that establishes new governance arrangements for the Murray-Darling Basin.**

A key priority under the Government's *Water for the Future* policy is to streamline water management of the Murray-Darling Basin. One element is to transfer the current powers and functions of the Murray-Darling Basin Commission to the new independent Murray-Darling Basin Authority. The Authority will be required to develop and administer a strategic plan for the integrated and sustainable management of water resources in the Murray-Darling Basin. This plan is referred to as the Basin Plan.

### Timeline to transition

- On 3 March 2008 the *Water Act 2007* came into effect. This legislation establishes the Murray-Darling Basin Authority and states the mandatory content for the Basin Plan, including:
  - limits on the amount of water that can be taken from Basin surface and ground water resources on a sustainable basis;
  - identification of risks to Basin water resources;
  - an environmental watering plan to optimise environmental outcomes for the Basin;
  - a water quality and salinity management plan; and
  - rules about trading of water rights in relation to Basin water resources.
- On 26 March 2008 at the COAG meeting, the Commonwealth and Basin States agreed to a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in order to implement co-operative, efficient and effective governance arrangements in the Murray-Darling Basin.
- On 3 July 2008 COAG signed an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) on Murray-Darling Basin Reform to give effect to the MOU. Under the IGA, governments committed to a new culture and practice of Basin-wide management and planning, through new structures and partnerships.

- The IGA includes arrangements for critical human water needs, comprehensive and consistent water trading arrangements across the Basin, the transition of the Murray-Darling Basin Commission to the new Murray-Darling Basin Authority, and a new Ministerial Council and Basin Officials Committee.
- On 23 July 2008 Robert Freeman was appointed as the Chief Executive of the Murray-Darling Basin Authority. Mr Freeman will commence on 8 September 2008. He will act as Chief Executive and Chairman for three months or until amendments to the Water Act come into effect that separate the roles of Chairperson and Chief Executive, whichever comes first.
- Governments have agreed to use best endeavours to amend relevant legislation so the new governance arrangements will commence on 1 November 2008.
- The Murray-Darling Basin Commission will continue to operate as normal until transition to the new Authority. The Authority will then assume the current functions of the Commission.

### Murray-Darling Basin Authority

The establishment of the Murray-Darling Basin Authority means that for the first time, water planning in the Basin will be undertaken by an independent, expert-based body. The new Authority will have two roles:

- to develop and oversee implementation of a Basin Plan.
  - Central to the Basin Plan will be sustainable diversion limits on water use in the Basin to ensure the long-term future health and prosperity of the Murray-Darling Basin and to safeguard the water needs of the communities that rely on its water resources.
  - The Plan will be prepared using the most up-to-date information available, and in consultation with Basin States and communities. Under the IGA, the first Basin Plan is due by 2011; and
- to assume responsibility for the current functions of the Murray-Darling Basin Commission and implementing the decisions made by the new Ministerial Council and the Basin Officials Committee relating to these functions.

The new Ministerial Council and Officials Committee will have representatives from each of the six Basin jurisdictions.

*Water for the Future* is a long-term plan to secure the water supply for all Australians. The Government is investing \$12.9 billion over 10 years to address four key priorities:

- Taking action on climate change
- Using water wisely
- Securing water supplies
- Supporting healthy rivers



## **MORE INFORMATION**

For more information visit: [www.environment.gov.au/water](http://www.environment.gov.au/water)

You can also call the Department of the Environment,  
Water, Heritage and the Arts on 1800 218 478.

For a copy of the Agreement on  
Murray-Darling Basin Reform visit:  
[www.coag.gov.au/coag\\_meeting\\_outcomes/2008-07-03/docs/Murray\\_Darling\\_IGA.pdf](http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2008-07-03/docs/Murray_Darling_IGA.pdf)

For information on current activities of the Murray-Darling Basin  
Commission call 02 6279 0100 or visit [www.mdbc.gov.au](http://www.mdbc.gov.au)

