



Australian Government

WATER for the FUTURE

Restoring the Balance in the Murray-Darling Basin

The Australian Government is committed to restoring the health of our rivers by investing in more efficient water use and delivery, by finding new sources of water, and buying back water entitlements from willing sellers to return water to the environment.

Water for the Future is a \$12.9 billion plan to secure the long-term water supply for all Australians. As part of this plan, \$3.1 billion will be invested in *Restoring the Balance in the Murray-Darling Basin* to purchase water entitlements from willing sellers.

The health of the Murray-Darling Basin (the Basin) is in decline. The ecosystems which rely on the water flowing through the Basin's rivers and tributaries are under considerable pressure, due to unsustainable extraction levels for irrigation and other extractive uses. This problem is likely to become worse as water availability declines, due to climate change.

Without sufficient water, the Basin's ecosystems will continue to deteriorate, threatening many species and the viability of farming, non-rural production, cities and towns.

It is critical that immediate action is taken to address these problems. The recently established, independent Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) will develop a new Basin Plan, including a sustainable cap on surface and groundwater extractions in the Basin.

In developing this Basin Plan, the MDBA will account for future climate change and address the legacy of past excessive use by including all consumptive users of water in the Basin. However, it is not acceptable to wait until the new Basin Plan comes into effect in 2011, before more water is returned to the environment.

Under *Water for the Future*, excessive consumptive use and declining river health are urgent priorities and these are to be addressed immediately by the *Restoring the Balance in the Murray-Darling Basin* program.

The goal of *Restoring the Balance in the Murray-Darling Basin* is to acquire water entitlements from willing sellers that represent value for money, and use the water allocated to them for the environment. This will improve the health of the Basin's rivers, wetlands and floodplains.

The Australian Government conducted the first round of water purchases in 2007–08. Around 24 gigalitres of entitlements worth nearly \$34 million have been purchased as a result of the first purchase round.



Walker Flat South Australia (J Baker & DEWHA).

The 2008–09 water purchase program is now operating across the northern and southern Basin. These purchases will deliver additional water to high value environmental assets in the Basin.

The Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder, in the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts, will manage the Commonwealth's environmental water. It will cooperate with other environmental water holders and managers to make sure water is used as effectively as possible.

The Murray-Darling system has had too much water taken out for too long. Now is the time to restore the balance, and investing in long-term water security for the environment will take the pressure off these important river systems.

MORE INFORMATION

For more information about the *Restoring the Balance in the Murray-Darling Basin* program, call 1800 218 478; email: waterpurchasing@environment.gov.au or visit www.environment.gov.au/waterpurchasing

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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