

WENTWORTH GROUP

OF CONCERNED SCIENTISTS

Dr Emma Carmody, Prof Tim Flannery FAA, Mr Mike Grundy, Dr Terry Hillman AM, Prof Lesley Hughes,
Prof David Karoly FAA, Prof Richard Kingsford, Prof Martine Maron, A/Prof Bradley Moggridge, Prof Jamie Pittock,
Mr Robert Purves AM, Ms Teagan Shields, Prof Fran Sheldon, Prof Bruce Thom AM, Mr Martijn Wilder AM.

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UPHOLDING THE MURRAY-DARLING BASIN PLAN

The Wentworth Group welcomes and strongly supports Prime Minister Albanese's and Minister Plibersek's commitment to "uphold" the Murray-Darling Basin Plan.¹ We remain concerned that based on the best available science, the Murray-Darling Basin will remain overallocated, even if the Basin Plan target of 3,200GL in water recovery and environmental equivalence offsets is met by 30 June 2024.

Recent events have demonstrated the consequences of inadequate environmental flows leading to blackwater events, mass fish kills and major declines in drinking water quality in affected towns in the Basin. Pre-flood releases from dams in 2022 were limited by delays in the implementation of the Basin-wide Constraints Management Strategy² which may have exacerbated the damage caused by subsequent floods. Such delays and shortcomings in the implementation of the agreed Basin Plan under previous governments have had significant negative consequences for the environment and Basin communities.

We agree with Minister Plibersek's recent assessment that the Murray-Darling Basin Plan is "off track" and needs a "course correction" to be able to deliver the Basin Plan in full.³

There is a unique window of opportunity for governments to work together at the upcoming Ministerial Council in August 2023 to restore community confidence by agreeing to implement the Basin Plan in full.

To deliver the Basin Plan in full governments need to:

- 1. Recover the remaining water for the environment.**
- 2. Abandon the socio-economic test.**
- 3. Extend deadline for constraints relaxation and viable SDLAM supply projects.**
- 4. Abandon un-viable SDLAM supply projects.**
- 5. Revise the SDLAM reconciliation method.**
- 6. Implement the Constraints Relaxation Management Strategy.**
- 7. Fully implement the Northern Basin toolkit.**
- 8. Review Accreditation of Water Resource Plans specifically Indigenous Inclusion.**
- 9. Scope options to address major new issues for the 2nd Basin Plan for climate change adaptation and Aboriginal water rights.**

¹ <https://anthonyalbanese.com.au/media-centre/labors-plan-to-future-proof-australias-water-resources-butler>

² MDBA (2013) Constraints management strategy 2013 to 2024. Murray-Darling Basin Authority, Canberra.
<https://www.mdba.gov.au/publications/mdba-reports/constraints-management-strategy>

³ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2023-07-05/murray-darling-basin-plan-targets-advice-request-tanya-plibersek/102559824>