

# BACK ON TRACK

## COMMUNITY STRATEGY TO RESTORE INTEGRITY IN THE MURRAY-DARLING BASIN PLAN

The **Murray Darling Basin Plan** set out to save our rivers from environmental disaster. Since the **\$13 Billion Plan** began in 2012, there has been major concerns raised with implementation, including allegations of **corruption, maladministration and mismanagement.**

Communities who depend on our rivers fear that if we don't act now to bring the Plan back on track, **our rivers will die** and dependent communities will decline.

Here, we present a **7 point strategy** to restore integrity to the Plan, so it can deliver on its key objectives – to keep the rivers and dependent communities **alive and well.**

PROTECT RIVER FLOWS

BUILD RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

ESTABLISH GOOD GOVERNANCE

SECURE FIRST NATIONS CULTURAL WATER ALLOCATIONS

ALIGN WATER EXTRACTION WITH SCIENCE

TRACK THE PROGRESS

IMPROVE TRANSPARENCY

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## COMMUNITY STRATEGY TO RESTORE INTEGRITY IN THE MURRAY-DARLING BASIN PLAN

### 1. PROTECT RIVER FLOWS

Prevent redirection of environmental water to other uses, including for private purposes during dry times.

Resume open tender buybacks to enable cost effective water recovery and meet Basin Plan environmental targets.

Protect low flows and maintain connectivity within and between the rivers of the northern Basin.

### 2. BUILD RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

Support Basin communities broaden their economic base to adjust to a more variable water future and build socio-economic resilience.

Encourage wider representation and participation in decision making and actively encourage First Nations involvement to address cultural water needs in the Basin.

### 3. ESTABLISH GOOD GOVERNANCE

Restore the National Water Commission as the independent oversight body for national water reform

Establish an independent Federal Basin Plan Regulator to deal with enforcement of water resource plans, underpinned by a Nation Integrity Commission

Undertake rigorous independent assessment of all water recovery projects prior to any further funding or works, including 'bridging the gap' and Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment Mechanism (SDLAM) supply and efficiency measures.

Ensure trading rules protect the environment

### 4. SECURE FIRST NATIONS CULTURAL WATER

Secure unallocated surface and groundwater across the Basin as a Strategic Indigenous and Environmental Reserve.

Provide appropriate funding for First Nations to buy water in fully-allocated systems, and co-design models for acquiring and holding water entitlements.

Address urgent threats to cultural values and Native Title rights in the Lower Darling and other critically impacted waterways by restoring low flows and connectivity.

Develop a national First Nations Water Strategy to address key unfinished business in water reform.

### 5. ALIGN WATER EXTRACTION WITH SCIENCE

Ensure Sustainable Diversion Limits (SDLs) reflect an environmentally sustainable level of take, including accounting for climate change.

Licensing of floodplain harvesting must not be used to increase overall water extraction limits

Include minimum flow provisions under low flows and drought in all sub-catchments as part of Water Resource Plans.

Fund and implement a comprehensive Native Fish Strategy

### 6. TRACK THE PROGRESS

Conduct a full independent audit of environmental water recovery to date, including water availability for provision of environmental flows.

Measure real world river flows against Basin Plan targets, with improved modelling, monitoring and reporting.

Undertake an independent review of whether the Basin Plan is meeting its objectives under the Commonwealth Water Act, while allowing for realistic timeframes for ecological restoration and consideration to whether Australia is fulfilling its obligations to protect internationally recognised RAMSAR sites.

### 7. IMPROVE TRANSPARENCY

Adopt a consistent approach to measuring, monitoring and compliance across all Basin States through mandatory metering and real time monitoring including satellite tracking, to provide up-to-date information on water availability.

Establish a free, publicly-accessible register of water ownership across the Basin, and a National Water Exchange with public reporting of all water trades.

Require open access to all data, modelling and reporting conducted by the MDBA

**The Lifeblood Alliance consists of environmental, Indigenous and community groups committed to keeping the rivers, wetlands and aquifers of the Murray-Darling Basin healthy for the benefit of current and future generations.**