



MDA Submission

**Review of Lachlan, Macquarie-Cudgegong
and Namoi regulated water sharing plans**

Murray Darling Association Inc.

[REDACTED]
Chief Executive Officer



Contents

.....	1
Executive Summary	2
Introduction.....	2
Context	3

Executive Summary

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback to the Natural Resources Commission on the Review of Lachlan, Macquarie-Cudgegong and Namoi regulated water sharing plans.

We acknowledge that the Natural Resources Commission (NRC) is interested in hearing from all stakeholders on the environmental, social, cultural, and economic outcomes of the plan, and where changes to the plan may improve these outcomes.

Following consultation with its members across the Murray-Darling Basin, the Murray Darling Association has provided the following recommendation for the Lachlan, Macquarie-Cudgegong and Namoi regulated water sharing plans:

- **The urgent implementation of all recommendation from the NSW Natural Resources Commission in relation to the Long Term Average Annual Extraction Limits.**

Introduction

The [Murray Darling Association](#) is the peak body representing Local Government across the Murray-Darling Basin, with our membership base divided into 12 separate regions in which Councils have common interests.

- Regions 1, 2, 3, and 4 represent councils in Victoria and New South Wales,
- Regions 5, 6, 7, and 8 represent councils in South Australia,
- Regions 9, 10, and 11 represent councils in New South Wales,
- Region 12 represents councils in Queensland.

As the management, and the success of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan is a matter of concern to our members, the Murray Darling Association has written the following submission relating to the review of Lachlan, Macquarie-Cudgegong and Namoi regulated water sharing plans.



Context

What is a water sharing plan?

- The purpose of water sharing plans is to prescribe how water is managed, firstly to provide for the environment and also to support social, economic and cultural outcomes. These plans typically apply for a period of ten years. At the end of this term, the Minister for Water may decide to replace or extend a plan.
- Water sharing plans are prepared by the NSW Government Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water. See the Department's webpage for further details.

Why are independent reviews of these plans important?

- As the water sharing plans approach expiry, they are subject to an independent review by the Natural Resources Commission. This is a statutory requirement under Section 43A of the Water Management Act 2000.
- Independent reviews are an opportunity to better understand where improvements can be made to improve environmental, social, economic and cultural outcomes.
- The Commission's reviews provide the Minister for Water with evidence to inform their decision to either make a new plan or extend an existing plan when a water sharing plan approaches expiry.
- The final report will be published on the Commission's website, providing transparency of findings and recommendations.
- For more information about the review process and the Commission's role in water management, please see the Commission's webpage.

What will the review focus on?

- The review will focus on the extent to which the water sharing provisions in the plans have materially contributed to the achievement of, or the failure to achieve, environmental, social and economic outcomes. They will also identify whether changes to plan provisions are warranted.

For more information about the review process and the Commission's role in water management, please see the Commission's webpage: <https://www.nrc.nsw.gov.au/water/wsp-reviews/home>

Submissions close Sunday 23rd February 2025



Long Term Average Annual Extraction Limits

Following engagement with its Members across the Murray-Darling Basin, Members councils and non-local government entities noted that the one consistently missing action in water management across NSW had been the setting of extraction limits, required under the Water Act 2007 (Cth) to protect the water source as well as downstream communities, stock and domestic and town water quality and availability.

Members had referenced the Natural Resources Commission's March 2023 released Issues Briefs on consistent issues in water management - notably the lack of Long Term Average Annual Extraction Limits (LTAAELs), noting that these must be set in each Water Sharing Plan.

Members expressed that, unless, and until, NSW introduce LTAAELs (beginning with areas at high risk of currently being above sustainable limits), the Darling-Baaka would continue to miss out on the low- and moderate floods it used to enjoy, and would compound water scarcity issues, such as:

- recent fish kills,
- low dissolved oxygen, and
- high nutrient levels (including nitrogen and phosphorous)

Members had noted that these would continue the demise of the "...ecosystem in crisis" as the Darling-Baaka was described by NRC in 2019.

MDA Members have stressed that, without LTAAELs, water management would remain a guessing game, one easily skewed against protection of the water source.

This would be to the detriment of many important wetlands and especially end of system regions such as Wilcannia, Menindee and Wentworth Shire.

MDA Members have expressed that there can be no way of ensuring NSW was compliant under the Basin Plan without extraction limits, nor could projections be based on best available science - all water management depended on a number describing the limit of extraction which will ensure future sustainability.

It had been indicated by Members, that, if that number needed to be reviewed, as it must annually, better planning and surety could be provided to industry, communities and first nations, so water was shared as it should, in a sustainable way into the foreseeable future.

Members noted that Incorporating LTAAELs within water resource plans and water sharing plans would provide the ability to suspend low priority extraction, such as Supplementary, Floodplain and High Flow licences until such time as end of system (Wentworth Darling Junction) flow connectivity and water quality parameters are met, and prioritise end of system water quality and equity by increasing the amount of water meters and including water quality meters along the Barwon-Darling river.

MDA Members had also referenced the following from the document drafted in 1992:

- The proposals in this Interim Plan will establish:
 - target flows along the Barwon-Darling River and priorities for river health and riparian flows,
 - a basis for sharing unregulated flows between irrigators and better control of extractions,
 - improved monitoring and research programs, and
 - an advisory committee and a performance reporting process.
 - [Menindee-Fish-Deaths-Report Findings-and-Recommendations.pdf](https://www.nsw.gov.au/menindee-fish-deaths-report) ([nsw.gov.au](https://www.nsw.gov.au))

