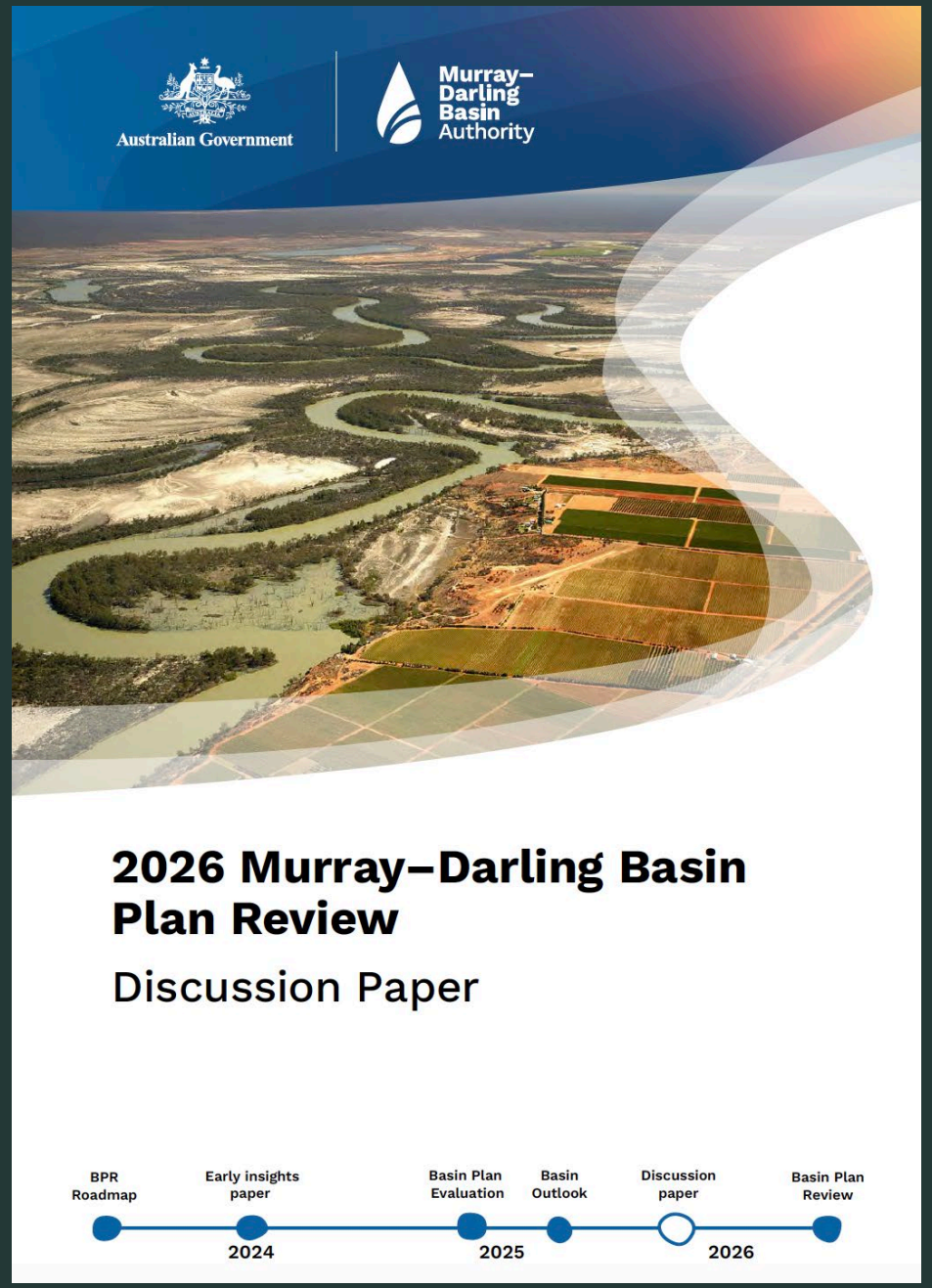
Voices from the Basin: One Basin CRC's Submission to the 2026 Basin Plan Review

Mike Stewardson
CEO, One Basin CRC

3 June 2026

First Basin Plan Review



Basin Plan Review
Submission Development Process

ONE BASIN CRC

01 Basin SCALE Declaration
November 2025

One Basin CRC brings together 20 leaders in integrated waterway and catchment management. The Declaration reflects the collective views developed through this collaboratively convened process.

20 thought leaders develop a cohesive directional statement

02 Basin Plan Review Hub
February 2026

One Basin CRC launches a webpage that collates research and resources on the key themes in the Basin Plan Review Discussion Paper.

03 Online Panel Sessions
March 2026

One Basin CRC hosts a series of online panel sessions and webinars that bring together partners, researchers, and other experts to discuss the key themes and topics present in the Discussion Paper.

9 online sessions
1775 registrations
918 attendees
700+ recording views

04 Collaborative Draft
April 2026

One Basin CRC's submission drafted in collaboration with the 31 hosts and panellists of the Online Panel Sessions.

Diverse range of contributing authors draft submission

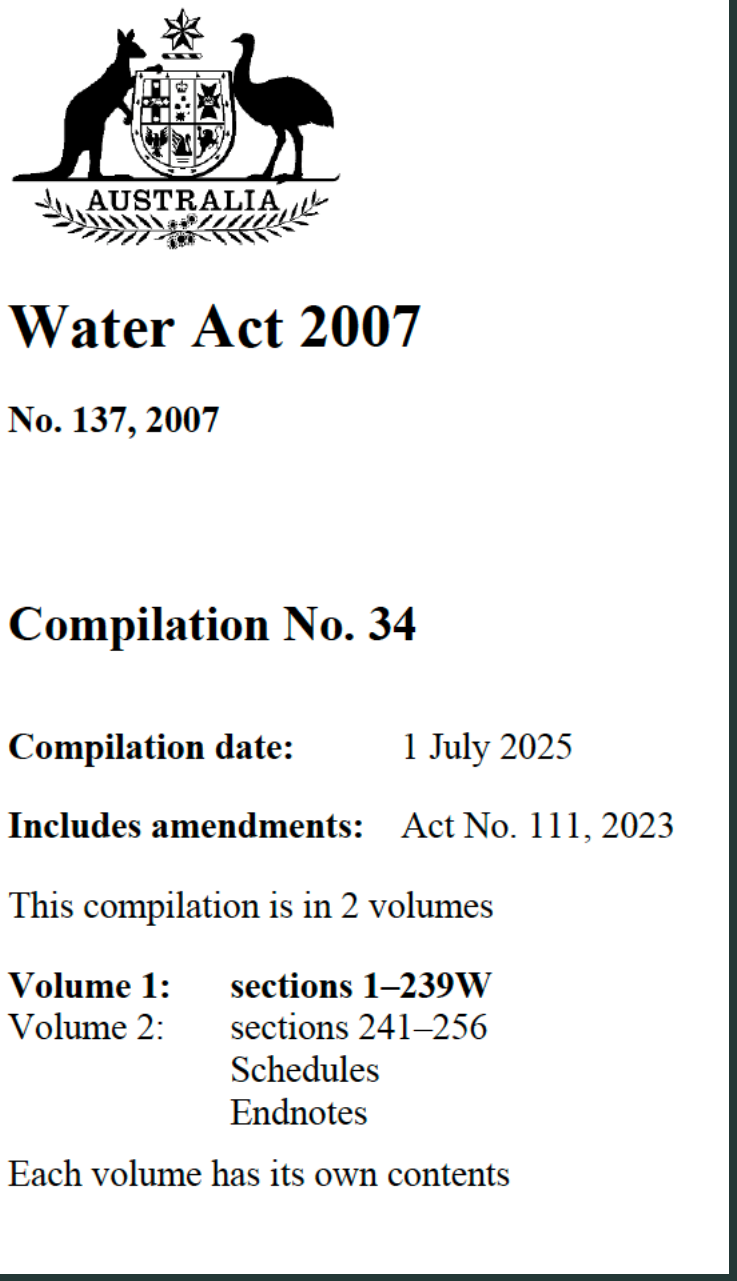
05 Review and Refine Ideas
April 2026

Sharing of the draft submission document, followed by the collection of detailed feedback from individuals involved with the CRC's 85 partner organisations.

Feedback solicited from:
85 partner organisations
400+ individuals

ONE BASIN CRC

One Basin CRC priorities



AUSTRALIA

Water Act 2007

No. 137, 2007

Compilation No. 34

Compilation date: 1 July 2025

Includes amendments: Act No. 111, 2023

This compilation is in 2 volumes

Volume 1: **sections 1–239W**
Volume 2: sections 241–256
Schedules
Endnotes

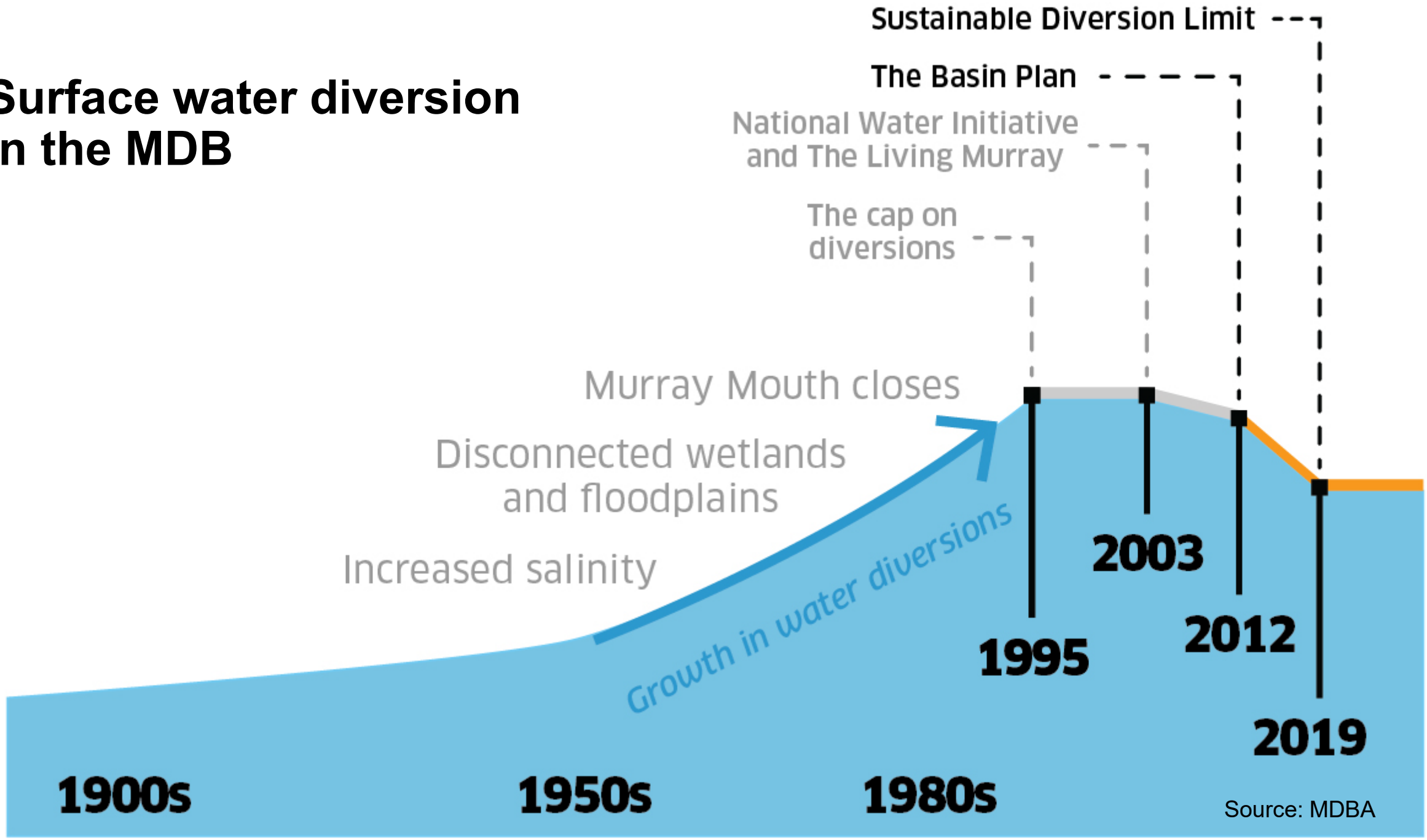
Each volume has its own contents

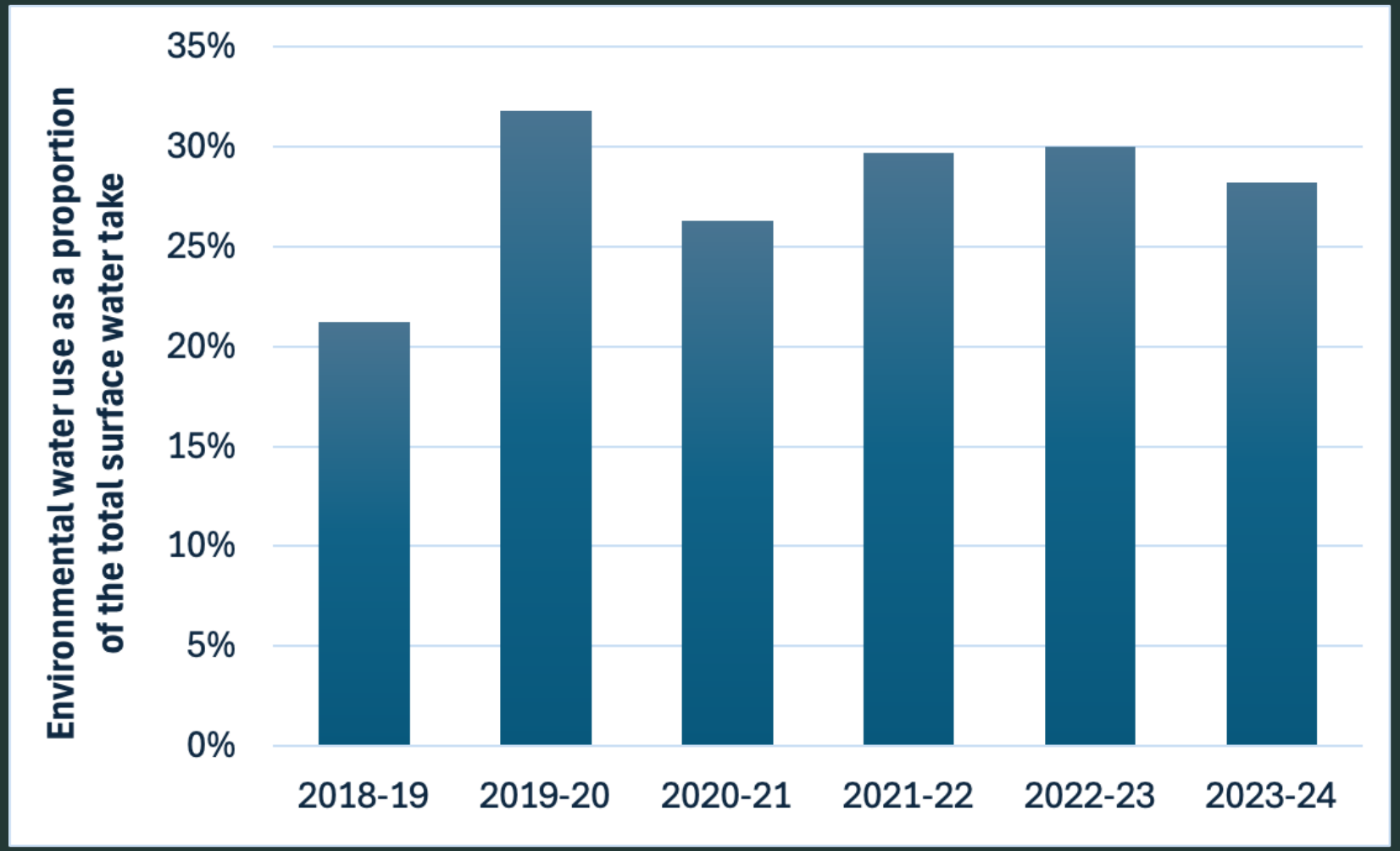
"The purpose of the Basin Plan is to provide for the integrated management of the Basin water resources"

Under the Water Act the Basin Plan provides for:

- **Environmentally sustainable limits on water take**;
- Basin-wide environmental objectives for water-dependent ecosystems;
- An efficient water trading regime; and
- Improved water security.

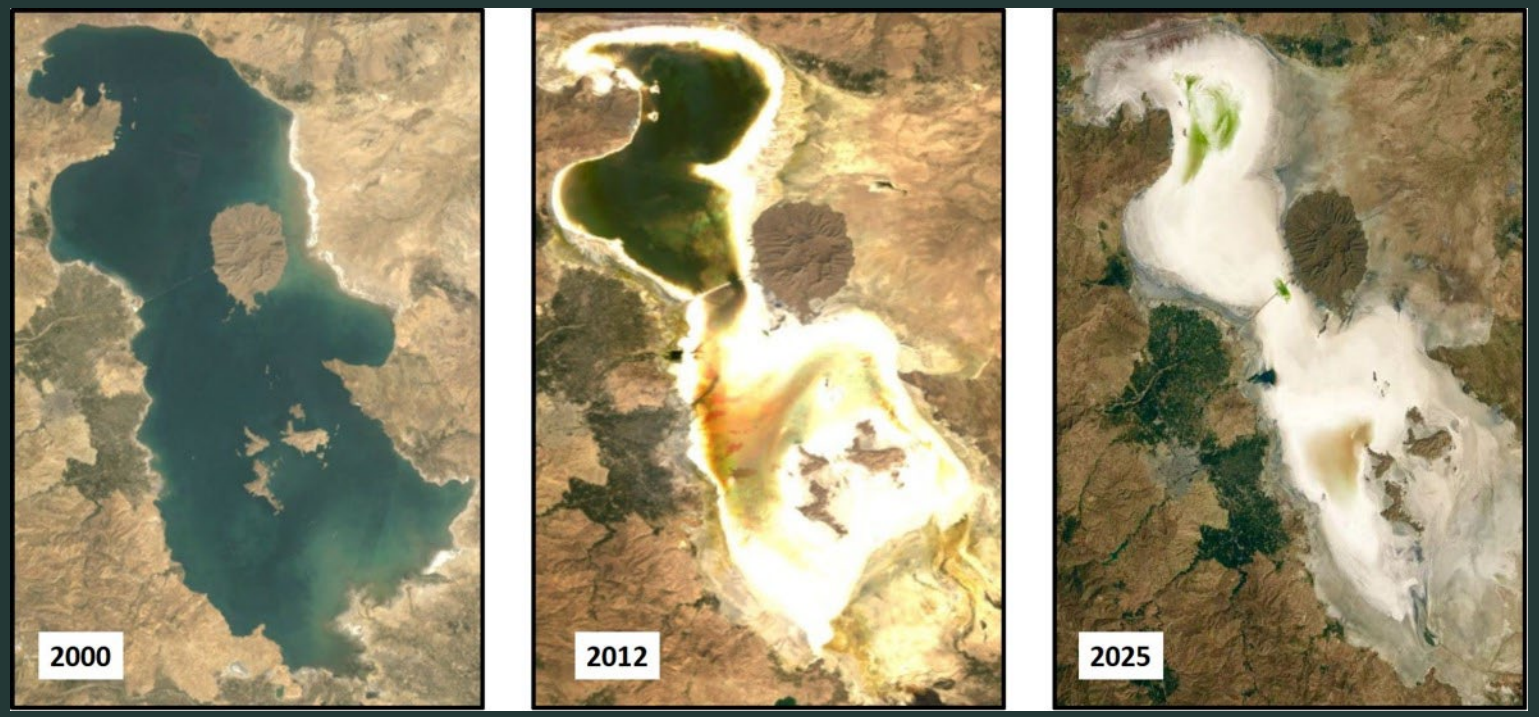
Surface water diversion in the MDB





BoM: Murray-Darling Basin Water Account

The MDB is world leading in environmental water recovery



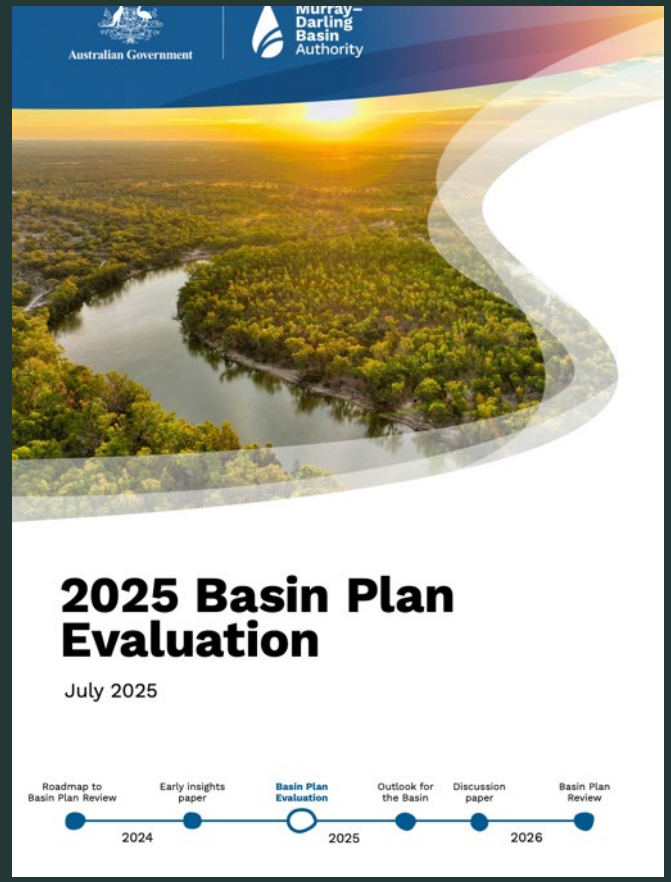
Basin Plan Evaluation

"The environmental condition of the Basin is better now than it would have been without the Basin Plan. **Water for the environment is essential, but on its own is likely not sufficient**. "

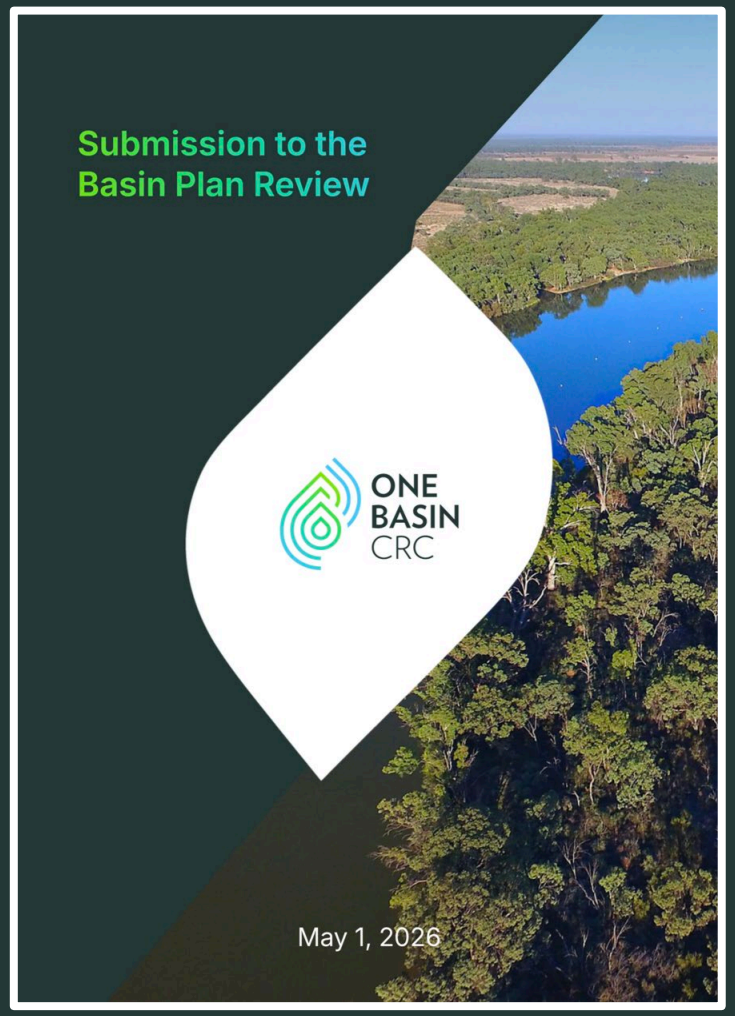
"Basin-scale outcomes for [waterbird] species richness have been achieved. However, improvements in abundance have not been observed."

"Native fish populations in the Basin have continued to decline in recent years. There have been poor fish breeding and movement outcomes across the Basin…. "

"Factors such as water quality, riparian and floodplain management, pest control, instream habitat ... are also crucial to achieve environmental outcomes."



One Basin CRC Recommendations



https://onebasin.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/OneBasin_BPR_Submission_Final_Formatted_1-May-2026_V3.pdf

- Strengthening an integrated approach to basin management
- How can this be implemented?
- What does this mean for the Basin Plan?

What is the One Basin CRC doing already?

Integrated catchment management

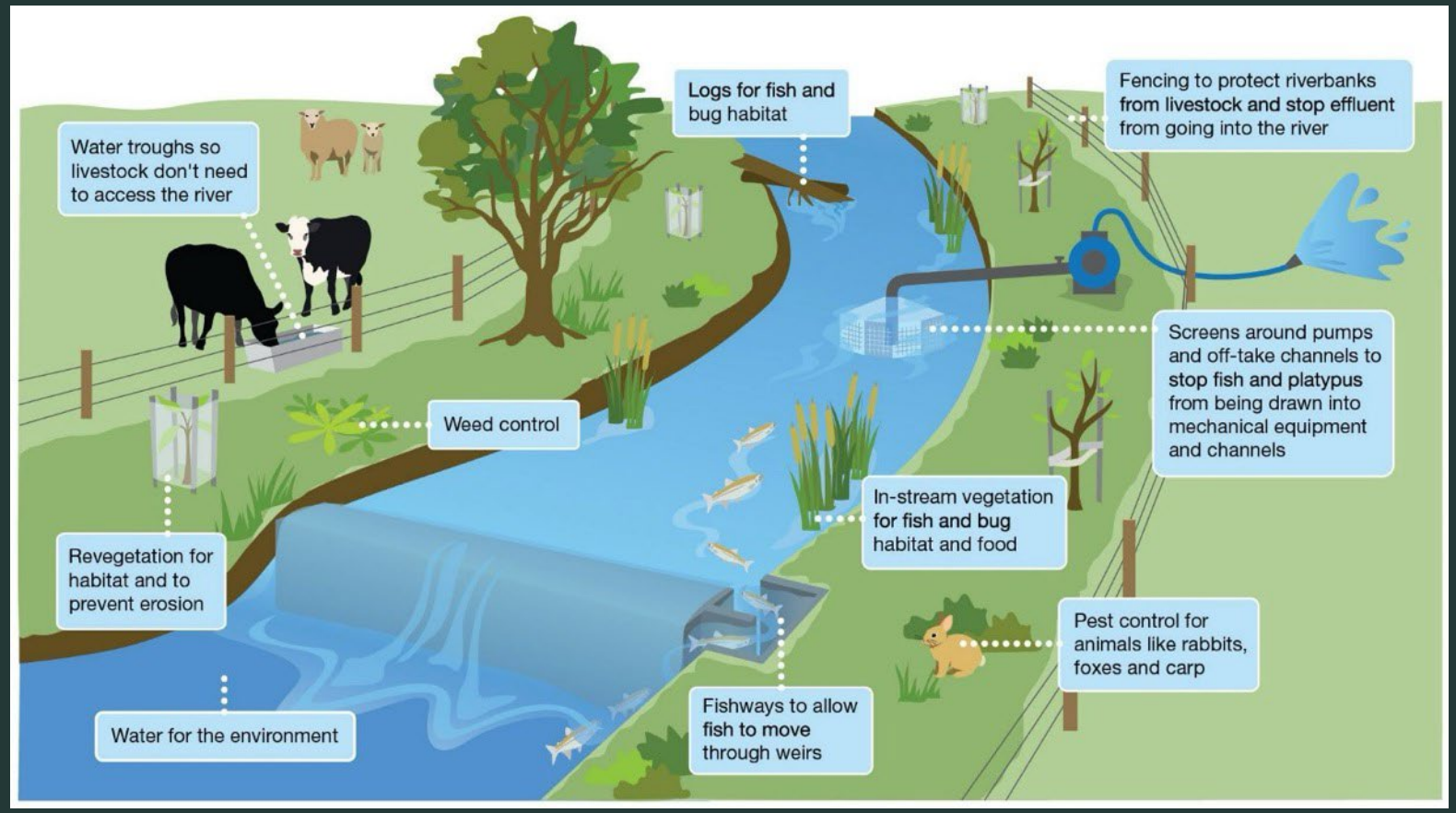
water, land, communities and ecosystems are managed together not as separate problems.

The key question is no longer …

How much water should be recovered?

It is…

How do we maximise the value created from the environmental water already recovered?



Source: Victorian Environmental Water Holder

Pergamon

Wat. Sci. Tech. Vol. 32, No. 5-6, pp. 15–25, 1995.

0273–1223/95 $9·50 + 0·00

0273-1223(95)00642-7

MURRAY-DARLING BASIN COMMISSION: A CASE STUDY IN INTEGRATED CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT

D. J. Blackmore

Murray-Darling Basin Commission, GPO Box 409, Canberra, ACT 2601, Australia

ABSTRACT

This paper describes the Australian Murray-Darling basin experience in integrated catchment management, what has been achieved and what remains to be done. The basin water is shared by three states, but falls under the jurisdiction of four governments, that of the Commonwealth as well as the State governments. The critical development in recent years at the political and bureaucratic level was the establishment of a three-tier management structure that allows common interests to be developed, discussed, resolved and implemented. Two main problems had to be resolved before significant co-operative action could take place, namely the issues of water sharing between the states and the sharing of costs associated with Murray River salinity. A framework Salinity and Drainage Strategy was developed to address this, and is described.

This paper also describes the Natural Resources Management Strategy, the cornerstone of efforts to sustain the natural resources of the basin. The strategy emphasises community participation and empowerment. The problems identified, strategic aims to address these problems and the role of community action are detailed.

KEYWORDS

Community participation; integrated catchment management; Murray-Darling Basin; salinity; water quality.

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Integrated catchment management is participatory, community-led, and focused on the health of the whole system

Confluence Project

Supporting Integrated Catchment Management by Integrating Data for Fish and River Health Across the Murray–Darling Basin

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Not new data. *The data already exists. What doesn't yet exist is the* ***architecture to connect it.***

Integrated data framework

Harmonises fish, habitat, hydrological and infrastructure data across the Basin using 300,000 ANAE wetland polygons

Priority site mapping

Where citizen science, fish passage, and habitat restoration will have greatest impact for native fish

Data governance diagnostic & scenarios

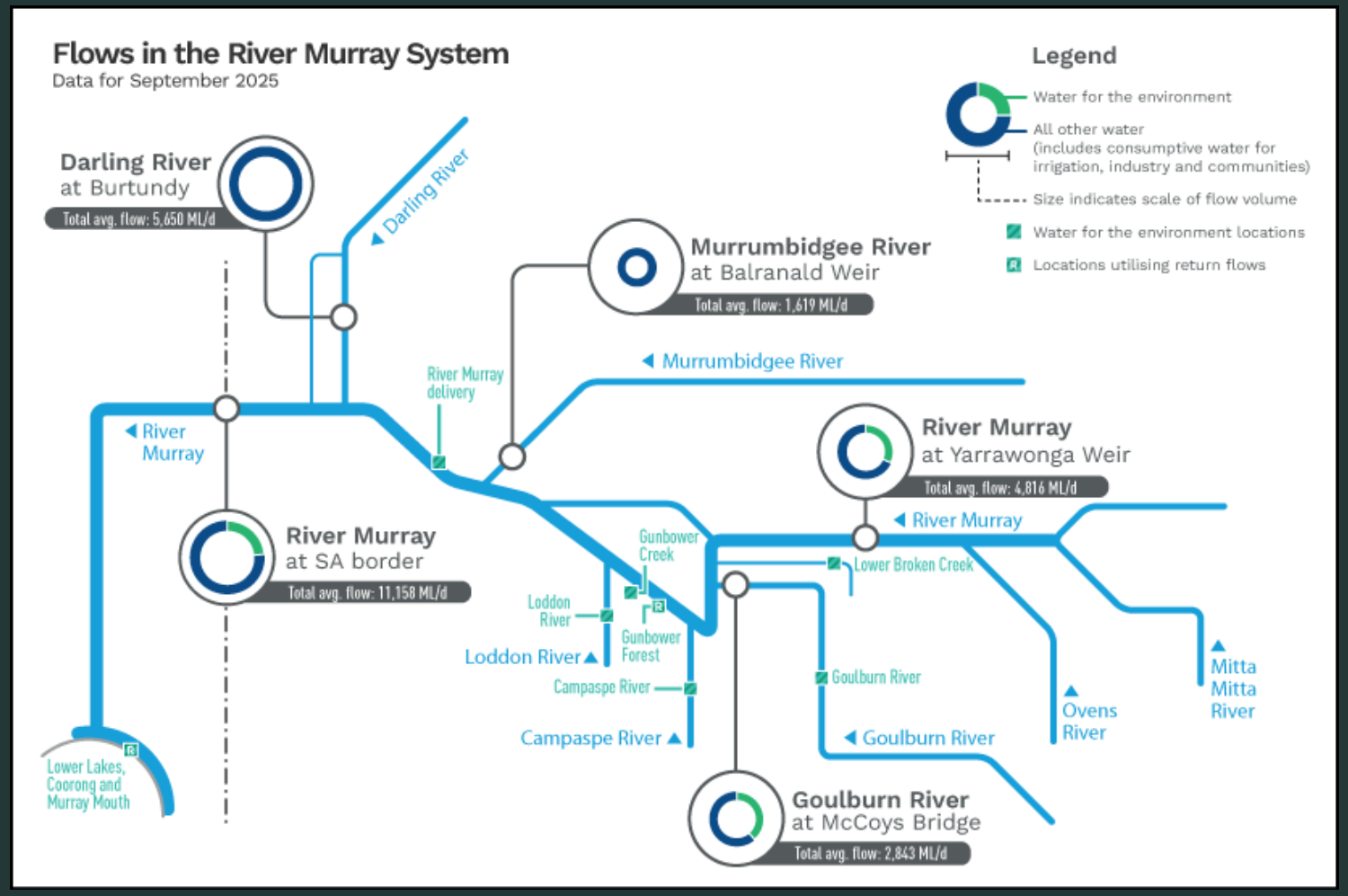
Maps who holds what data, under what conditions, and why. Three scenarios for Basin data governance to 2040

Open-access repository

Consolidated dataset on Zenodo — permanent, citeable. A contribution to the Basin's knowledge commons

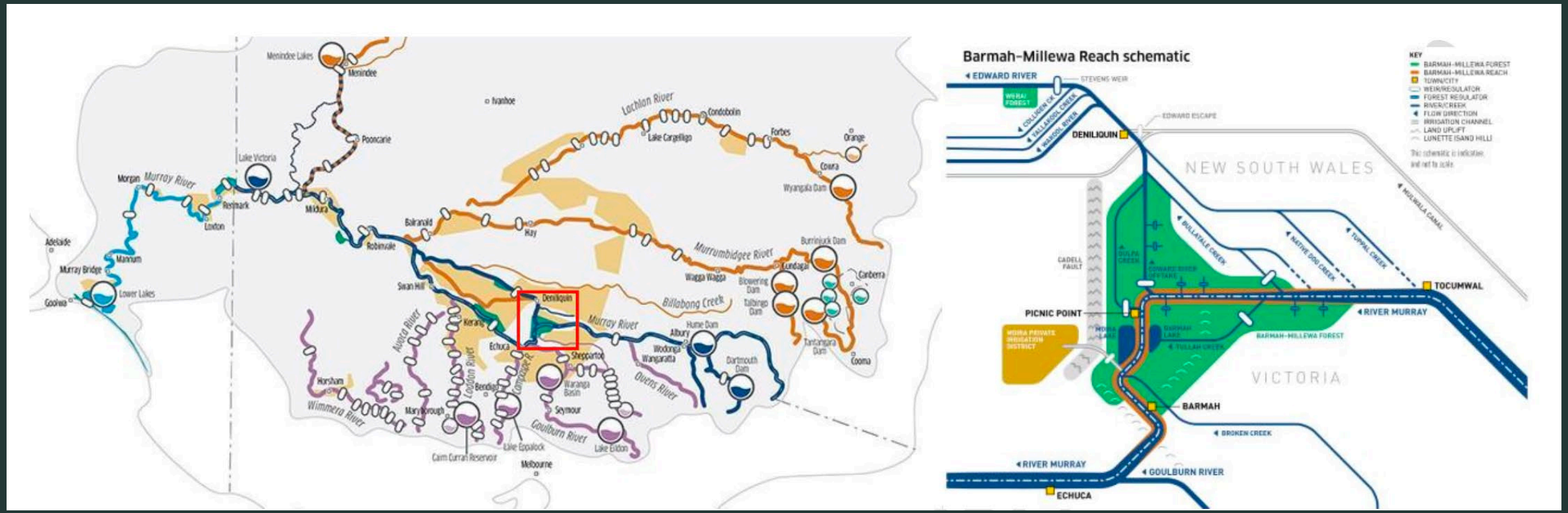
Integrated water infrastructure

Optimising water infrastructure and system operation for multiple benefits

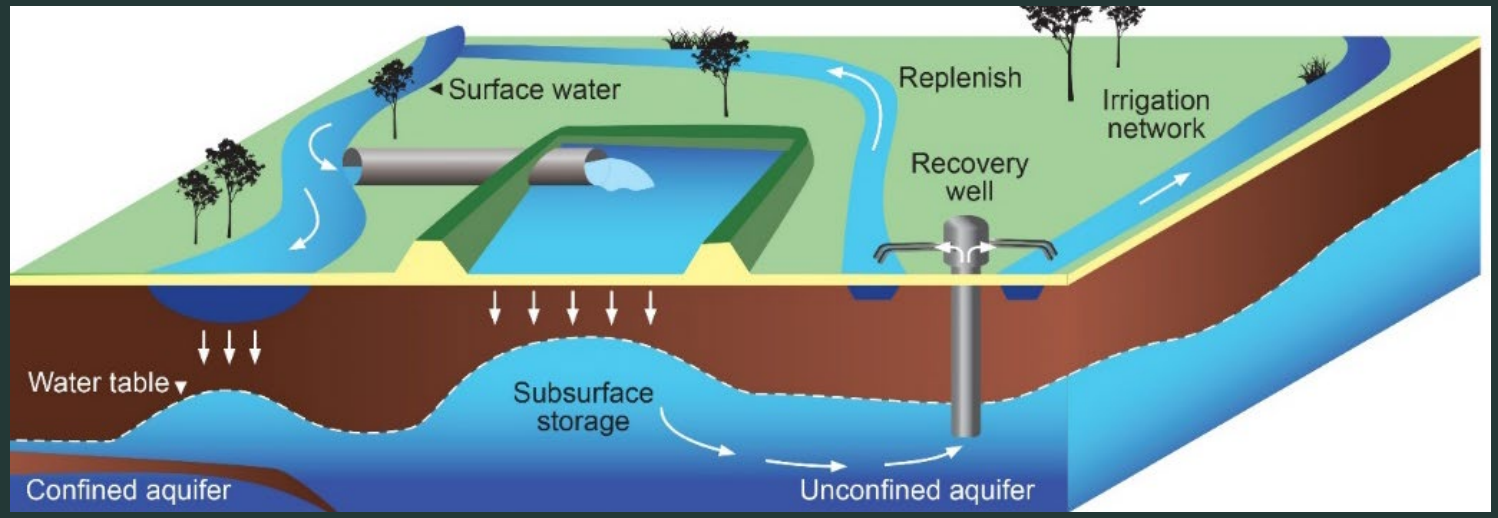


MDBA

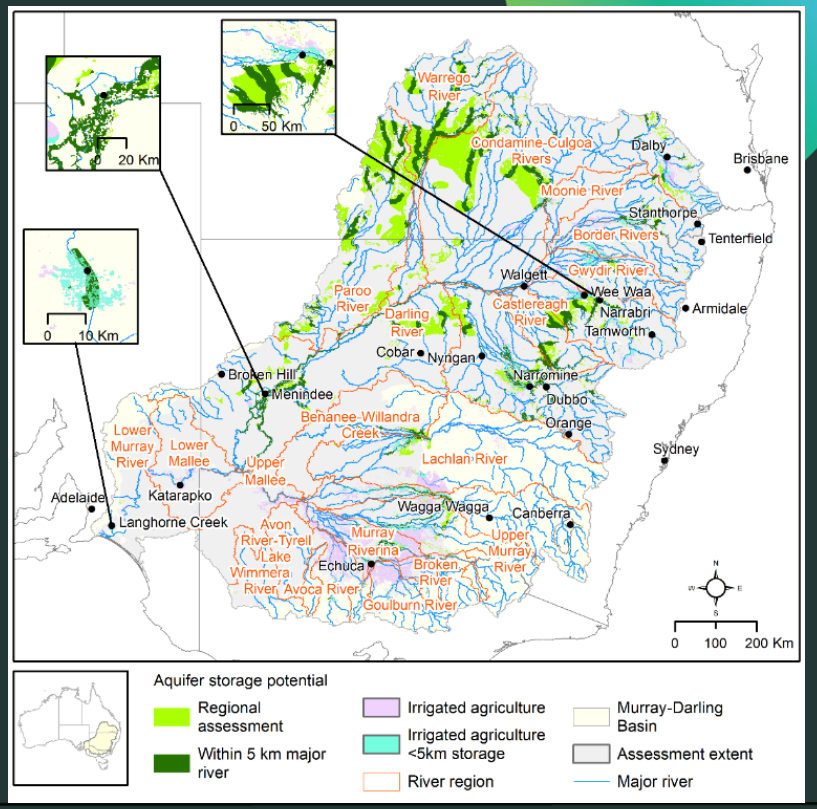
Integrated water system operation



Water banking



Page et al. (2022)



Gonzales et al. (2020)

Local and regional
Individual users, councils, irrigation entity)

Purpose

- Enhance local water security through stormwater or recycled-water recharge.
- Provide cost-effective, small-scale supply reliability and drought resilience.
- Support local amenity, flood mitigation, and potential environmental or cultural watering.

Catchment / Network
Regional utilities, water corporations, Irrigation Networks

Purpose

- Improve reliability and flexibility within regional supply networks.
- Manage peak demand pressures and provide buffer storage for multiple users.
- Enable network operators to balance competing irrigation, urban, and environmental needs.

Statewide / Bulk
State Governments / Bulk Suppliers

Purpose

- Establish strategic reserves to safeguard entitlement reliability, town and industry supplies.
- Operational flexibility for strategic releases to manage flood and drought risks, inter-annual carryover and environmental and First Nations outcomes.

Basin-wide / System
***M**DBA or Intergovernmental Management*

Purpose

- Reduce system losses and overcome constraints (e.g. Barmah Choke) through coordinated storage and delivery.
- Improve flood management, reliability efficiency, and environmental and First Nations outcomes by optimising trade and delivery.

How can an integrated approach be implemented?

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4 Innovative finance models

1. Enabling local leadership (subsidiarity principle)

2. Recognising First Nations knowledge and authority

3. Taking an adaptive learning approach

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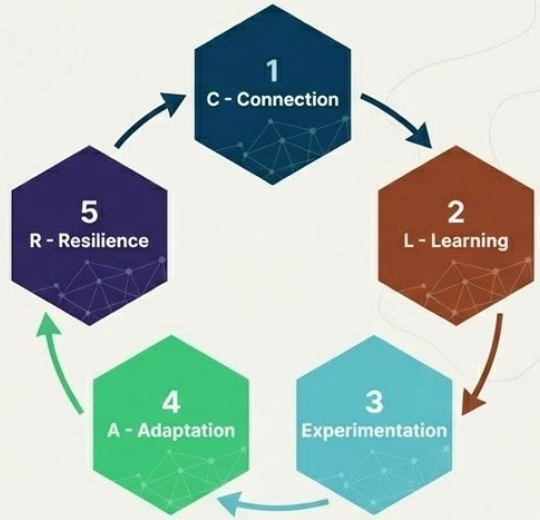
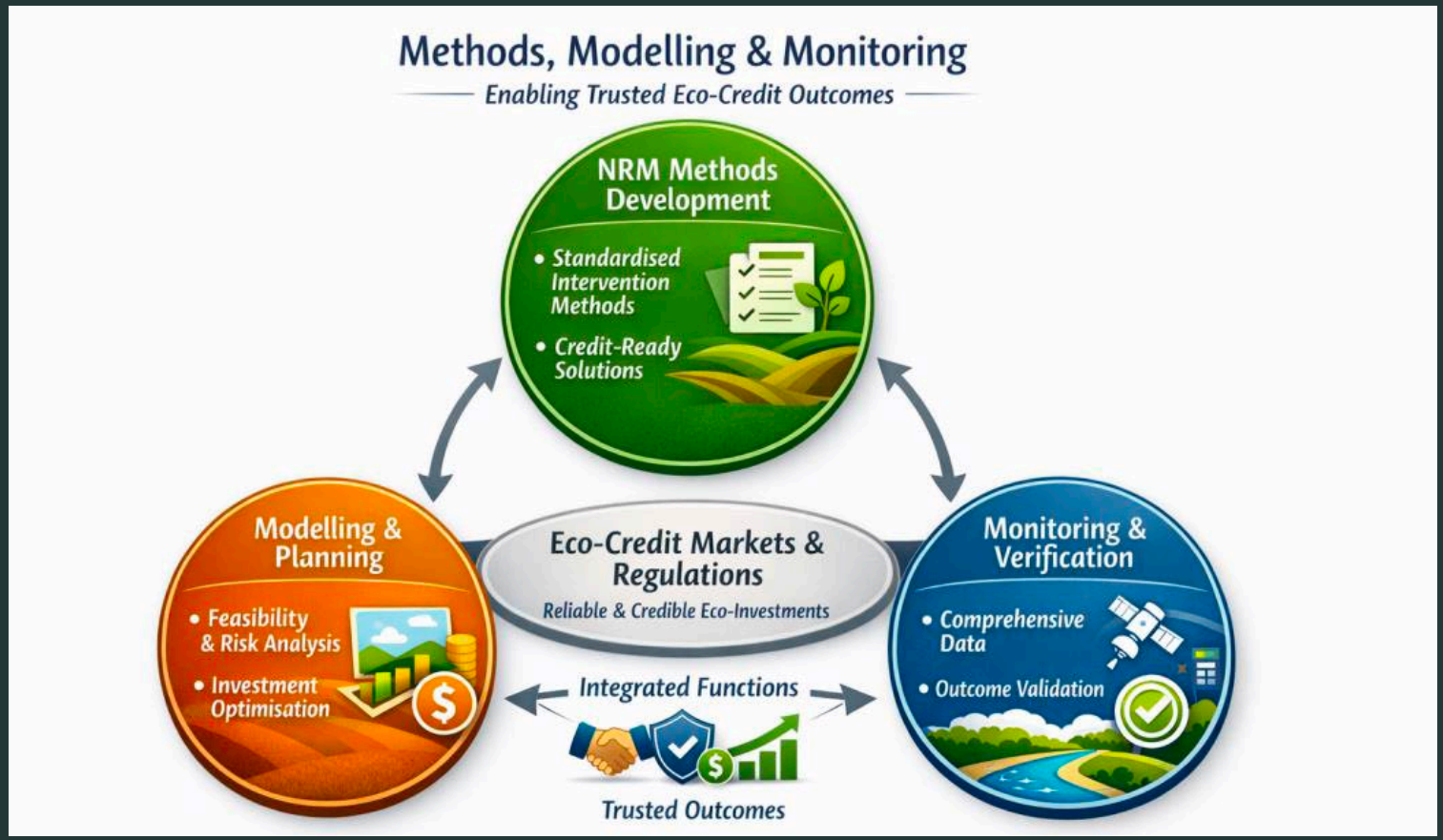
The Engine of Change: The CLEAR Framework



Core Philosophy: Complex systems like the Murray-Darling Basin do not change simply because new knowledge is produced. They change when people connect, learn together, test ideas, and gradually adapt the system.

4. Innovative finance models



What does this all mean for the Basin Plan

1

2

3

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“Ngarni Yuntulur
~ We Are All Connected”

by Kyla McHughes