

STORAGE INFORMATION as at November 9th, 2011

	%	ML
Coolmunda	92	63,000
Glenlyon	100	255,000
Pindari	100	312,000

STOP PRESS: The Draft Basin Plan will be released on MONDAY, November 28th.

BASIN PLAN

The Basin Plan continues to be drip-fed to the media in order to soften the impact of the release when it finally occurs.

In recent weeks I have met with Craig Knowles, Chair of the MDBA and Tony Burke, the Federal Minister. Knowles told us recently that he will not be coming around to individual valleys again before the release of the Draft Plan. He has previously committed to visiting each valley to give us 'the numbers', so we understand from this that we already have them.

THE NUMBERS

	In-stream	'Shared' Downstream
NSW Border R	8	Share of 140GL
QLD Border R	7	
TOTAL	15	??

The breaking up of the SDL numbers into 'In-stream' and 'Shared-downstream' components makes it impossible to quote a single number for each valley. It also creates further uncertainty because the exact numbers are not known. All this makes it more difficult to mount an argument against the thrust of the Basin Plan and in effect, disguises the real impacts of any cuts made. I have described this approach publicly as being largely 'smoke and mirrors', diverting the media's attention from the consequent social and economic impacts that will be felt wherever the reductions are made.

The explanation of 'who will bear what share of the 140GL 'shared downstream' component' is that it will be left up to the market. It will depend on where the 'willing sellers' come from over the next 7 years as the Commonwealth continues its buyback and efficiency programs. A realistic option is that the Border Rivers may contribute up to 50% of the 140 GL, so 70GL to the 'shared downstream' SDL. 70 plus 15 gets us to 85GL and the number in the Guide was 86GL as a minimum, so very little would seem to have changed from the Guide, despite the assurances from the MDBA that, "the Guide is dead".

Knowles has continued to say that the Draft Plan is 'not just about the numbers' and in many ways we agree with him. The numbers on their own will achieve little,

but it is what the media and the greens are focussed on as the indicator of success or failure of the Basin Plan process. As irrigators, we are focussed on the actual outcomes being balanced. A Basin Plan that only achieves improvements in environmental health is unacceptable if that comes at the cost of harming or destroying many rural communities, right across the Basin. We are advocating that good outcomes can be achieved for all factors – social, economic and environmental – if done properly. To date, we have seen only changes in rhetoric coming from the MDBA and many of their deeds remain eerily similar to the ill-fated Guide. The biggest problem with the Guide was the lack of a clear link between the SDL numbers proposed and the environmental outcomes being sought. We don't expect that the Draft Plan will improve greatly on this fact, and that will be an avenue of attack.

BRFF took the initiative, earlier this year, in forming a local group that could be responsible for the management of environmental water in this valley, the Border Rivers Environment Water Network (BREWN). The aim of this group is to maximise the environmental benefit that is achieved through the use of that water in order to minimise the amount of water that will be taken out of production. The greater the environmental outcomes that can be achieved with Government water, then the less water they will need to take away from productive use. BRFF has always been a strong advocate for the practical environmental management of our region, especially the excellent, practical work that is done by the Landcare groups at the local scale. We see a key role for this work to be ramped-up in the Basin Plan process, in order to further maximise the value of any environmental water that is used. The more practical, on-ground, Landcare work that is done, and real environmental outcomes achieved as a result, then the less need there will be for more water to be taken away from production in the future.

Mr Knowles continues to say that the Draft Plan will be the "start of a conversation". This 'conversation' is scheduled to run until April 2012 when the MDBA will withdraw to Canberra and finalise the Basin Plan, taking into account all the submissions and feedback and input made over that 20 week consultation period.

We don't have any detail yet on what the Consultation Period will entail. We have asked for public meetings at centres other than Goondiwindi to be included in their plans. There will be a number of opportunities to make submissions on Discussion Papers around the detail of the Draft Plan. These submissions will form the bulk of the feedback that the MDBA will take into account when drawing-up the Final Basin Plan.

One of the key parts we will be focussing on is justification provided for the removal of so much water from productive use. While we don't possess, nor can we afford, the scientific work to dispute that there is SOME need for SOME water in SOME places, we can dispute the assumptions around the volumes that they arrive at for SDL numbers, especially at the local level. There will be a Review of the progress of the Basin Plan in 2015, where the results of the whole Basin Plan process will be assessed. This will be a key opportunity for SDL's to be reduced in areas where environmental health is performing well, such as the Border Rivers already is.

OTHER POTENTIAL OUTCOMES

There is already a High Court challenge being pursued by a group of stakeholders in the Murray. There are, most likely, other cases being prepared by the larger green groups who have combined under the banner of 'Lifeblood'. The conservation groups are far better organised and resourced this time around, than they were last year and we can expect fireworks from them. There is, as a result of these legal challenges, a possibility that the Commonwealth Water Act may be returned to the Parliament for amendment. This could, of course, be both an opportunity AND a threat, depending on the outcomes, but changes to the Act in favour of the 'triple-bottom-line' approach is what irrigation and farming lobbies have been seeking ever since 2007 when it was first passed into law. The Greens can also be relied on to put up opposite amendments proposing that even more water go to the environment, but they are unlikely to be successful if there is bipartisan support for better community outcomes and THIS is the outcome that we need to occur.

There is also the chance that a 'Disallowance Motion' could be advanced by any party while the Final Basin Plan is in the Parliament. This could require the Minister to send it back to the MDBA to be re-drafted or scrapped and the whole thing started all over again. But there are no guarantees in life and especially in politics, so we will remain vigilant to all possibilities so we can pursue the best outcomes for our valley at all times.

Our broad aims in this effort are threefold:

Firstly, to reduce the amount of water taken out of productive use as it will severely impact our local economies and dependent communities, especially the smaller ones.

Secondly, if there is to be any water bought by government, we need to ensure that our irrigators are receiving the opportunity to get the maximum value for it, and that the works undertaken deliver real and lasting outcomes for our valley.

Thirdly, any environmental water derived from this valley, must be managed to achieve the absolute maximum real environmental outcomes so they are not

back again in 5 years' time looking for more water from irrigators.

KEY MESSAGES

If members are approached by media for comment our key messages are below for your reference:

- The Border Rivers is already the most sustainable valley in the MDB. There is no need for any water to be removed from our valley.
- Water cuts = higher food costs and less food security
- Family farms and some local country towns will be forced to close down.
- 'Just add Water' is a very poor plan for the environment. Better resourced environmental management is required to achieve REAL and lasting outcomes.

BUYBACK TENDER

There is a tender round open currently in the Border Rivers which closes at the end of this week. In this round they are targeting NSW entitlements of all classes, but ONLY UN-supplemented entitlements from QLD Border Rivers.

OFFICE CHANGES

In January 2012 I will be relocating with my family, interstate for family reasons. My role with BRFF will remain unchanged, but I just won't be sitting at my desk in the office in Goondiwindi all the time. Rachel Gresty will continue to work from the office and keep the wheels turning daily. I will return to conduct the quarterly Affiliated Association, General Committee and attend any other meetings as required. I will continue to represent the organisation at all State and Commonwealth peak-bodies and government meetings, as required. I will do as much as I can by phone and teleconference to reduce travel costs, but I will be in attendance at all times, when needed.

I will remain available to all members by phone (mobile) and email at all (reasonable) times. Most members should see no change at all, unless they drop in to the office for a catch-up, which I will miss. I will be available to teleconference with anyone who does drop in to the office, if they so desire.

INTERSTATE TRADING GUIDELINES

These new Guidelines are available online – follow the link on the our website

WEBSITE

Just a reminder that we will be continuing to update our website brff.com.au with all information on the Basin Plan and any other developments as they arise, so please visit it regularly. We will also advise all members by email of any major developments as they occur.