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## Water stakeholders hear expert Basin Plan update

More than 200 representative water stakeholders gathered in Canberra today for an expert update on the development of the new Murray-Darling Basin Plan.

Murray-Darling Basin Authority Chair Mr Mike Taylor said the group included representatives of farming, conservation, irrigation, water management peak bodies, Indigenous, departmental representatives of all tiers of government, science bodies and researchers.

They heard presentations from Mr Taylor, Chief Executive Rob Freeman and the other members of the Authority board Dianne Davidson, Dr Diana Day, David Green and Professor Barry Hart.

Mr Taylor said the forum built on the extensive and intensive public consultation work the Authority had undertaken over the past year.

The Authority is developing the first ever Basin wide plan to sustainably manage surface water and groundwater resources throughout Australia's food and fibre bowl.

A proposed (draft) plan will be released for public discussion later this year and the final will go to the Commonwealth Government in 2011.

Mr Taylor said one of the topics discussed at today's forum was how the Authority would calculate overall environmental water needs for the Basin Plan.

Delegates heard that the Authority would use the environmental water requirements of the Basin's key ecosystem functions and 18 of the Basin's key environmental assets (listed below) to provide vital information for modelling sustainable diversion limits (SDLs).

"The SDLs are the limits on the quantities of surface water and groundwater that can be taken from the Basin water resources taking into account environmental water requirements and a social and economic analysis," Mr Taylor said.

"The 18 key environmental assets are large, with a wide range of habitat types and significant water requirements and provide much crucial data for our modelling.

"When combined with the water required to maintain the key ecosystem functions that shape the Basin's unique aquatic ecosystems, this approach provides a robust means of calculating the environmental water requirements of the Basin.

"The assessment of the overall water requirements of the Basin is central to the success of the Basin Plan. It is through these that we will be able to approach the issue of establishing long term environmentally sustainable diversion limits across the Basin.

"However, it is important to appreciate that how the overall environmental water requirements of the Basin will be managed is yet to be determined. This will be set out in the Environmental Watering Plan, as part of the proposed Basin Plan."

The Authority also released a report which summarises the approach used and lists the 18 indicator environmental assets. (A copy is available on request).

“We are making the report public to help all those groups and individuals throughout the Basin to prepare for their feedback to the draft Plan after its release later this year,” Mr Taylor said.

“We hope this information will help to put some important aspects of the Plan into context and help stakeholders to start thinking about the process.

“I would caution anyone from inferring the scale of reductions in future water availability from this information. We still need to do a lot of analysis and complex hydrological modelling,” Mr Taylor said.

**The 18 ‘indicator’ assets are:**

- Lower Balonne River Floodplain System
- Narran Lakes
- Lower Goulburn River Floodplain
- Gwydir Wetlands
- Booligal Wetlands
- Great Cumbung Swamp
- Lachlan Swamp
- Lower Darling River System
- Macquarie Marshes
- Barmah-Millewa Forest
- The Coorong, Lower Lakes and Murray Mouth,
- Riverland – Chowilla Floodplain (including Lindsay, Mulcra and Wallpolla Islands)
- Edward-Wakool River System
- Gunbower-Koondrook-Pericoota Forest
- Hattah Lakes
- Lower Murrumbidgee River Floodplain
- Mid Murrumbidgee River Wetlands
- Wimmera River Terminal Wetlands

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