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## CEWH Applauds MDBA's Basin Plan Assessment

July 24, 2025

— Categories: *Economics*



The Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder (CEWH) has endorsed the Murray-Darling Basin Authority's (MDBA) 2025 Basin Plan Evaluation, highlighting its environmental gains but stressing the need for further economic balance. While the plan has restored water flows, critics argue it burdens farmers and regional economies, raising questions about its long-term sustainability under current policies.

The MDBA's 2025 Basin Plan Evaluation, released on July 25, 2025, confirms the Basin Plan's success in returning over 2,000 gigalitres (GL) of water to the environment, boosting native fish breeding and flushing 4 million tonnes of salt from the River Murray (Mirage News, 2025). Acting CEWH Dr Marcus Finn praised the plan's "world-leading ambition," noting its effectiveness in delivering environmental water to rivers, wetlands,

and floodplains despite climate challenges (Mirage News, 2025). The plan, enacted under the Water Act 2007, aims to balance the Murray-Darling Basin's (MDB) ecological health with human needs across New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Victoria, and the Australian Capital Territory. Yet, the economic toll on irrigation-dependent communities remains a sticking point, with reduced water allocations hitting agricultural output.

Critics, including the National Farmers' Federation, argue the plan's water recovery—reallocating 3,200 GL for environmental use—has slashed farm productivity, costing regional economies billions. The 2020 Basin Plan Evaluation noted mixed impacts on agriculture, particularly in smaller communities reliant on irrigation (MDBA, 2020). Shadow Agriculture Minister David Littleproud called for more flexible water trading rules, stating, “Farmers need certainty to plan, not restrictive policies that choke growth” (The Australian, 2025). The MDBA's focus on relaxing physical constraints, like bridges and river rules, aims to improve water delivery, but progress is slow, leaving farmers frustrated.

The CEWH remains committed to adaptive management, collaborating with Basin states, First Nations groups, and industry to refine water use. Dr Finn emphasized partnerships to “secure the Basin's health for future generations” (Mirage News, 2025). However, the opposition warns that without addressing economic fallout, the plan risks alienating rural communities. As the 2026 Basin Plan Review looms, balancing environmental gains with agricultural viability remains critical to sustaining Australia's food bowl and regional economies.