

PACIFIC - NORTH AMERICA

AUSTRALIA

THE MURRAY DARLING BASIN INITIATIVE

The Murray Darling Basin is over one million square kilometers in area and stretches across four States and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), all of which are party to the Murray Darling Basin Agreement 1992 with the Commonwealth (Federal Government).

The collective efforts of the four States, the Commonwealth and the ACT to manage the resources of the Basin are known as the Murray Darling Basin Initiative. In its broadest sense the Initiative involves two separate but related issues, namely:

- the sharing of the waters of the Basin between the States of New South Wales (NSW), Victoria and South Australia,
- the development of policies and programs to promote the integrated catchment management of the Basin.

The institutional arrangements for the Initiative are set out in the Agreement. They are as follows:

The Ministerial Council, which was established in 1985, is responsible for determining

policy issues of common interest. It is the peak body under the Initiative.

The Council consists of Ministers from each State, the Commonwealth and from the ACT (who has observer status), who have prime responsibility for matters relating to water and environment and the Commonwealth Minister chairs the Council.

The Initiative is in effect an inter-jurisdictional compact between the Commonwealth and States. It requires high-level political engagement.

The Community Advisory Committee (CAC) was established in 1986 for advising the Ministerial Council on matters referred to it and to provide advice on the views of the Basin's committees.

The CAC is comprised of an independent chair and 26 members, 21 of whom are chosen on a catchment or regional basis, four are drawn from non-government groups and the last represents the Aboriginals.

Under the leadership of current Chair, the CAC has been

an active, independent, and powerful community voice.

The Murray Darling Basin Commission, which can be traced back to 1917, was the peak body under the various Agreements. Since 1985, the Commission has answered to the Ministerial Council.

The current Commission was established in 1992 and requires members who between them represent "water, land and environmental resource management." Two Deputy Commissioners are also appointed. The ACT has observer status.

Traditionally, Commissioners have been the heads of State Government Departments and deputy level secretaries of the relevant Commonwealth Departments. An independent President, appointed by unanimous vote of the Ministerial Council, chairs the Commission.

The Commission is responsible for advising the Ministerial Council in relation to the "planning, development and management of the water, land and other environmental re-

sources" of the Basin and giving effect to decisions of the Council and for administering the Agreement, including the sharing and distribution of the waters of the River Murray, overseeing and directing the implementation of approved works and measures, and coordinating efforts at achieving integrated natural resource management across the Basin.

The Office of the Commission:

The Commission has the power to employ staff, which it does through the Canberra based Office.

This Office has more than 70 highly skilled staff. The Office also provides support to the Ministerial Council, the Commission and the CAC.

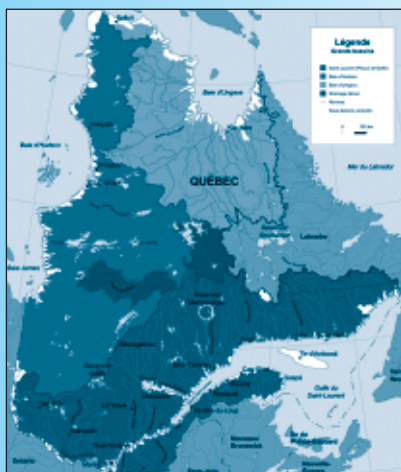
The Office is responsible for managing the sharing and distribution of water and Natural Resource Management.

John Scanlon
Commissioner, Murray Darling Basin Commission 1997-2000.
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www.iucn.org/themes/law

www.mdbc.gov.au

QUEBEC



The river basin management approach, chosen by Quebec, is a participatory one based on the involvement of local stakeholders. It is gradual by focusing on 33 priority river basins in a first stage.

These Basin Organizations, created on a voluntary basis, are small bodies whose first responsibility is to dialogue, at local and regional level, with all water stakeholders in order to formulate a Water Master Plan (WMP). Having a statute of non profit legal entity (NGO), the Basin Organizations are made up of members representing all the local and regional, private and public water stakeholders (representatives of municipalities, of citizen groups, water users and of the Ministries concerned).

The Association of the Basin Organizations of Quebec ("ROBVQ") is also a NGO whose mandate is to represent the Basin Organizations with the governmental bodies and to make known integrated water management at the level of river basins to all organizations and people involved and concerned with this topic. It has among its members the current 27 Basin Organizations out of the 33 priority river basins of Quebec.

The WMP will be implemented by using Basin Contracts, individual or collective voluntary commitments of the water stakeholders who want to get involved in activities for the protection, rehabilitation and development of water resources and aquatic ecosystems. The Basin Organization has the power of providing recommendations and influencing, especially by publishing the WMP and the follow-up of the commitments made.

A structured integrated river basin management in Quebec also requires the preparation of guidelines and other technical documents. A first reference document was drafted by the Ministry of the Environment to specify the role of the Basin Organizations, their representativeness, the participation of the population, the use of knowledge for decision-making support and the dissemination of information.

Lastly, the Ministry of the Environment is reconsidering the coordination of the State's actions and quickly developing the National Water Fund that should finance integrated river basin management on the long term in Quebec.

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