

## STORAGE INFORMATION at Feb 10<sup>th</sup>

	%	ML
<b>Coolmunda</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>51927</b>
<b>Glenlyon</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>163030</b>
<b>Pindari</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>274050</b>

The period since Christmas has been consumed with the submission to the MDBA on the proposed amendments to the Basin Plan as a result of the Northern Review. The due date for submissions has been extended from February 10th to February 24th, an extension of two weeks.

## Northern Review - The Numbers

GL	
3200	The total that can be recovered under the Basin Plan as it currently stands including 450GL 'Upwater' (southern basin only) agreed in 2012.
2750	Original (2010) total of Basin Plan recovery target
390	Original total northern basin recovery target - NSW and QLD
320	Proposed new total northern basin recovery target - NSW and QLD
278	Total already recovered in northern basin
247	Original 'Local Reduction' total for northern basin
143	Original 'Shared Reduction' total for northern basin
23	Original QLD Border Rivers total recovery target
29	Proposed new QLD Border Rivers total recovery target (+6)
16	Original NSW Border Rivers total recovery target
7	Proposed new NSW Border Rivers total recovery target (-9)

BRFF will be making a submission and we are also involved in making submissions through our northern NSW valleys group, NSW Irrigators Council, National Irrigators Council and NFF/Australian Farmers. We strongly urge as many individuals as possible to make a submission, even if it is only a one-pager with some bullet-points. This is one of the rare opportunities that we get to make our individual voices heard and the more submissions that they receive delivering the same consistent messages, the more weight it will carry.

We should all be aware that there will be opposing arguments being made in submissions as well. We are already aware of one organisation that is running an on-line campaign with a 'one-click submission' process that is pushing for an increase in the recovery target from 390GL up to 415GL as a minimum. I believe they have over 100 identical submissions lodged already and there will be others doing the same thing.

I have fielded some questions over the last few months asking why irrigators are even involved with this campaign. Their reasoning is that, as water-users, we have no direct threat to us as water is being recovered voluntarily, the Commonwealth government is paying market prices for it and there are government-funded on-farm infrastructure programs available to those who want to use them. Irrigators fought very hard for property rights to our water so that governments had to do reform this way, so why are we worried about it? The answer I provide is that we are standing up for our communities so that we don't become collateral damage in government-driven reform process as some towns have already (See table on Page 2). We see it as a bad outcome if we have good irrigation businesses but there are no schools in our small towns anymore, it is hard to get a mechanic or a plumber, our parts are two days away and not available locally and our local community activities fade away due to lack of support. As irrigators, we are an integral part of our local communities and we are fearful that continued water recovery will have unwarranted negative impacts on our local communities. We are in there fighting to preserve and enhance the productive capacity of our communities and we cannot sit idly by and watch our towns decline while we can do something about it. Country towns everywhere, especially small ones, are struggling for survival as it is, with many other factors already impacting them, but this Commonwealth water reform process is one factor that we can hopefully avoid, to a large extent, in the Border Rivers and more broadly across the north. In some cases it will be the 'straw that breaks the camel's back' as some towns reach a 'tipping point' and descend into a more rapid decline and ultimate death. Our experience with water reforms in the past has been a painful one and we have every right to be sceptical and suspicious about any government policy impacts on our water resources.

The following table illustrates the results of the socio-economic studies that the MDBA did over the last few years, it shows the impacts on employment observed to date (278GL already recovered) across the northern basin and its projections for what is likely to occur if the recovery of water continues as intended.

**Employment Outcomes for Water Recovery Scenarios**

Town	390 GL employment effects	320 GL employment effects	278 GL employment effects
Boggabri	<5	<5	0
Bourke	25	28	28
Collarenebri	54	54	54
Dirranbandi	64	49	33
Goondiwindi	17	24	+21
Gunnedah	18	12	<5
Moree	152	96	116
Mungindi	<10	<10	+3
Narrabri	17	<10	0
Narromine	55	41	55
St George	137	83	49
Trangie	17	13	17
Walgett	<5	<5	0
Warren	114	89	114
Wee Waa	32	23	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>Approx. 710</b>	<b>Approx. 530</b>	<b>Approx. 450</b>

Source: MDBA - Provided on request.

To date in our valley we have managed to avoid negative impacts of water recovery as a result of most of it occurring out of the on-farm infrastructure programs and not from 'buyback'. One important thing it shows is that the irrigators in the Border Rivers want to continue being irrigators. But there is still potential in the remaining recovery process for severe local impacts if it continues and that is what we are trying to avoid.

We have always worked closely with our local government and are lucky to have several councillors who are, or have been, irrigators and members of BRFF. Anyone who has experience with water policy knows that it is very complicated and a frequently-changing beast, particularly when there is more than one government involved and especially when there are two states and a Commonwealth government and all their various agencies and authorities active in your area. BRFF has the specialist knowledge and current information about water policy and management and we have kept the council abreast of developments and provided information and insights where required which has helped their understanding and response to the issues as they have arisen, and we will continue to do so.

The premise of our submission will be that we all agree that we want a healthy river and a healthy environment, especially as we are the ones who actually live in it and derive our livelihoods from it. Our issue is the way the

Commonwealth (MDBA) wants to achieve it (more water recovery), which causes far too much collateral damage. There is a better alternative and that is the far greater use of complimentary or 'toolkit' measures to achieve the same desired environmental results without causing all the damage to our communities. In the report on the Northern Review, the MDBA has now been allowed by the Ministerial Council to consider these practical natural resource management measures as a way to off-set water recovery by 70GL from 390GL to 320GL. Our submission will say that they should go a step further and use it to offset an extra 42GL of recovery so that it stays at the current level of 278GL and no more recovery occurs. BRFF has promoted these 'toolkit' measures as an offset from the very beginning of the Commonwealth's involvement in the Murray Darling Basin reforms in 2007, but have always had a negative response, until now. It has taken 10 years of consistently plugging away, but the recognition is now there that they can play a very important role in both improving environmental outcomes and protecting vulnerable communities. It is hard to believe that the Commonwealth was unable or unwilling to consider measures like eradicating European Carp, installing more fish-ways and fixing cold-water pollution from dams as worthy options to damaging water recovery, until now.

We have worked closely with NFF through Cotton Australia and our Irrigators Councils on the #morethanflow and #enoughisenough social media campaign, and they have established a link on the Australian Farmers website that automatically creates a submission for you and then submits it directly to the MDBA. Head to: [www.farmers.org.au/morethanflow](http://www.farmers.org.au/morethanflow). You can also do a submission of your own and lodge that through the MDBA submission site at this link: <http://www.mdba.gov.au/publications/mdbareports/basin-plan-amendments>. They can be lodged by email or by post, if you prefer.

We have circulated to all members our draft submission that you can choose to use as a template or cut and paste from for your own submission. We strongly encourage all members to lodge a submission **before February 24<sup>th</sup>**, as this will be our only opportunity to get the recovery reductions we have worked-for for the last 5 years. We also encourage you to ask your neighbours, the businesses you support and other community and business groups if they have lodged a submission as well.

An important thing to remember is that if this proposal to reduce recovery to 320GL or 278GL isn't successful, the recovery target will remain at 390GL.

**Coming Up:**

Submission Northern Review – Feb 24<sup>th</sup> BRFF General Committee Meeting - March 7<sup>th</sup>

**Social Media:**

BRFF has a presence on the following platforms:

Website: [www.brff.com.au](http://www.brff.com.au)

Facebook: @brff4390

Twitter: @brff1

Please feel free to 'Like', 'Follow' and 'Share'