

THE HON TONY BURKE MP
SHADOW MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT AND WATER
SHADOW MINISTER FOR CITIZENSHIP AND MULTICULTURAL
AUSTRALIA
SHADOW MINISTER FOR THE ARTS
FEDERAL MEMBER FOR WATSON

LABOR WILL GET THE BASIN PLAN BACK ON TRACK

Australians have watched an ecological disaster as a result of the failure of the Liberals and Nationals to properly implement the Murray Darling Basin Plan or take water reform seriously.

This election will be a choice between a united Shorten Labor Government which will get the Murray back into health, or more of the Liberals' cuts and chaos.

In addition to fish kills, there have been serious allegations of water theft, the undermining of the Basin Plan by Barnaby Joyce, as well as four reports focused on solutions:

- The Productivity Commission review of the implementation of the Basin Plan.
- The South Australian Murray-Darling Basin Royal Commission.
- The Academy of Sciences review into the fish kills.
- The Vertessy review into the fish kills.

There is no doubt action needs to be taken and it needs to be comprehensive. Labor will invest over \$120 million to:

- Ensure more water for the Murray Darling Basin by guaranteeing delivery of the 450GL, removing the cap on buybacks and reverting to the original socio-economic test in the Basin Plan relating to the 450GL.
- Restore integrity in the system by initiating a Commission of Inquiry into the purchase of certain water entitlements from Eastern Australia Agriculture Pty Ltd and moving the compliance division of the Murray Darling Basin Authority to the proposed EPA.
- Ensure the science is central to decision making and climate change impacts are understood.
- Improve transparency by investing for Basin-wide real time monitoring and re-establishing the Sustainable Rivers Audit.
- Help fish recovery.
- Support cultural water and First Nations' leadership in the Basin.

Labor can be trusted to get back work on restoring the Basin to health.

Details of Labor's package to get the Basin Plan back on track and restore the Basin to health are attached.

End the chaos. Vote for change. Vote for Labor.

MONDAY, 6 MAY 2019

MEDIA CONTACT: LABOR CAMPAIGN MEDIA - 02 9165 8299

ATTACHMENT

LABOR'S RIVER HEALTH PLAN

1. ***Ensuring more water for the Murray Darling Basin***

- a. Labor will recommence water purchase rounds which have been all but abandoned by this Government and some Basin States.
- b. Labor Government will guarantee delivery of an additional 450 gigalitres (GL) of water for the environment and run on-farm infrastructure rounds to recover water.
- c. Labor will immediately start constraints removal negotiations.
- d. Labor will support no further extensions in Water Sharing Plans/Water Resource Plans beyond what is currently permitted by legislation.
- e. Labor will also restore the original socio-economic definition for delivering the 450GL to the system.
- f. A Labor Government will strengthen the 2024 reconciliation process and buyback any water required if the projects that aim to deliver 605GL of environmental benefits fail to deliver the full amount of environmental benefits. If the shortfall in the 605GL projects requires purchases above the 1,500GL cap then this option is available because Labor has committed to remove the cap.
- g. Labor will consult and seek to secure A class licences to protect low flows in the Barwon Darling into the future, as recommended by the Vertessy report.
- h. Labor will reinstate the Native Fish Strategy with \$5 million and use improved monitoring and measurement data to update it.

2. *Restoring Integrity*

- i. Labor will establish a Commission of Inquiry into the 2017 purchase of certain water entitlements from Eastern Australia Agriculture Pty Ltd, under the Royal Commissions Act.
- j. Labor will commission an independent review, by the Australian Public Service Commission (APSC), into the governance and conduct of the Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA), to report to Government within six months.
- k. Labor will move the MDBA's compliance division in to the newly created Federal Environmental Protection Agency.

3. *Future proofing the Basin Plan by updating the science, including the latest data on climate change and the most recent drought period.*

l. Labor will ensure reviews of the Basin Plan and its implementation include a fresh audit of the latest science and information, compared to what informed the Basin Plan. This will include the latest data on climate change, evaporation and inflows.

m. Labor will commission CSIRO to re-run the Sustainable Yield study with a longer timeframe. The original Sustainable Yields study was to 2030, the new study would be to 2050 and will demonstrate what will happen to environmental health in the face of climate change. This work will inform reviews of the Basin Plan.

n. Labor will allocate \$6 million to an independent study of how climate change is likely to affect the Basin and RAMSAR sites across the Basin. This will include the impact of sea level rise on the Coorong and lower lakes as well as other key sites like the Ovens, Menindee, Macquarie marshes and red gum forests.

o. Provide \$20 million to expand research on the Murray-Darling Basin for better water and environmental management as well as examine how climate change will impact the Basin. This work will address gaps in our knowledge as recommended by the Academy of Science and Professor Vertessy.

4. *Stricter penalties, greater compliance, and more transparency to ensure the rivers' health*

p. Labor will introduce stricter penalties for non-compliance and water theft. Labor's policy will be "no meter no pump" across the entire Basin. Labor will consult with State governments on appropriate penalties.

q. Labor will provide \$52 million to improve monitoring, metering and measurement of the health of the Basin in real time, and to upgrade Geoscience Australia's remote sensing technology. This funding will give river managers and the

community the information they need to avoid ecological disasters like we saw in the Darling River this year, and to easily audit the health of the river system. Water flow rates are reasonably well understood. Upgrading existing monitoring stations to be able to give data on key indicators such as temperature, water quality, oxygen levels and turbidity will significantly improve monitoring. Consistent and regular monitoring of environmental sites, including cameras to live-stream, and DNA analysis of water where possible, will also help improve transparency.

r. Labor will reinstate the Sustainable Rivers Audit as part of the \$52 million investment.

s. Labor will work to make the MDBA more transparent. We will give the public access to real time metering and monitoring, to federal modelling, details of supply projects and all relevant information as it becomes available. Improving transparency is critical for the public to regain confidence, to maintain integrity in the system and to show outcomes.

t. Labor will audit floodplain harvesting and crack down on illegal structures that have been built in the Basin to divert water. This work will be informed by the work of the Northern Basin Commissioner and the reviews into fish kills in the Darling, south of Menindee.

5. Help fish recovery and linkages within the Basin

u. Labor will provide \$10 million to help restock rivers and lakes with native fish species across the basin and establish new hatcheries in the northern basin to kick start fish recovery.

v. Labor will allocate over \$5 million for the river connections and potential connections, for example the Warrego and Darling Rivers (as recommended by the Vertessy report) or the Lachlan and Murrumbidgee.

6. *Increasing First Nations involvement in governance, planning and operations in the Murray Darling Basin and cultural water*

w. Labor will increase Aboriginal engagement in decision making and governance arrangements for the Murray Darling Basin including, in consultation with First Nations' peoples, supporting increasing Board membership.

x. Labor will provide an additional \$50 million for cultural water (\$20 million in the forward estimates) and establish a National Indigenous Water Committee. This will build on the agreement Labor reached with the Government to allocate \$40 million for cultural water in the Murray Darling Basin from 2018.

These commitments are in addition to a number of Government-announced initiatives, which Labor supports:

- A new fishway at Menindee main weir and the removal of the Menindee old town weir to improve fish movement through the river system.
- Upgrades to two fishways and construction of a new fishway on the Lower Darling River below Menindee Lakes.
- Construction of a fishway between Frenchman's Creek and Lake Victoria to enable better fish passage along the Murray River.
- \$30 million with New South Wales to replace Wilcannia Weir and include a fishway that improves connectivity along that stretch of the Barwon-Darling River.
- \$180 million for Queensland and New South Wales to implement the northern Basin's toolkit measures to improve environmental outcomes in the northern Basin including protection of environmental water and works that promote fish health.
- \$3 million for a research program on ecosystem functions in the Murray Darling Basin.

- \$10 million Murray Darling Basin Environmental Water Knowledge and Research Project with the Basin states to inform environmental water management decisions with improved understanding of ecological responses.