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Food, land and water: lessons from the Murray–Darling Basin

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The story of the last 100 years of water management in the Murray–Darling Basin sets the scene for how we are placed today to meet the future challenges of climate change and increasing food demand.

This is a story of nation building and overcoming the huge challenges of developing agriculture in the driest continent with arguably the most variable water supply on Earth. It is a story of overcoming fierce interstate rivalries over water shares for the common good. It is a story of how governments and communities dealt with the significant environmental decline of the river system over the past 50 years.

And lastly it is a story of getting the right policy settings in place to underwrite a sustainable and productive future for all those who depend on these precious resources and landscapes. Australia has done this by setting a sustainable limit on water use, unleashing the innovation of farmers through the power of the market, and having flexible and adaptive systems that can respond to known and new challenges.

The Murray–Darling Basin contains 23 river valleys and Australia's two longest rivers, the Murray and the Darling. It has significant environmental values, and its