Australian Government

MURRAY–DARLING BASIN AUTHORITY

COMMUNIQUE

17-18 September 2019

Advisory Committee for Science, Economics and Environmental Sciences

At its meeting on 17-18 September 2019 in Canberra, the Advisory Committee on Social, Economic and Environmental Sciences (ACSEES) discussed the critical role of robust science to inform the future management of water in accordance with the Basin Plan, with particular reference to the impacts of drought and climate change that are currently challenging communities, industries and the environment across the Basin.

Members were briefed by the Chief Executive of the Murray–Darling Basin Authority (MDBA), Phillip Glyde, who noted the cross-jurisdictional efforts underway to prepare for expected dry conditions through spring and summer and the ongoing stress being experienced. Mr Glyde highlighted how the Basin Plan is helping to ensure that water in the Basin is being shared fairly between communities, the river environment and the industries of the Basin, all of which are critical to the wellbeing of local and national economies.

The MDBA's new Climate Change Program was discussed as a vital body of work to be undertaken ahead of the 2026 review of the Basin Plan. It was agreed that the three climate change workshops held through 2019 have provided a clear focus for the program and identified the leading experts and institutions to engage with. ACSEES urged the MDBA to strengthen existing connections with expert agencies such as the BoM, CSIRO and state government bodies, as well as industry bodies and international agencies working on climate change adaptation.

The Committee discussed recent community interest in the management of the Lower Lakes and agreed that the relevant science needed to be better communicated. ACSEES agreed to assist the MDBA in commissioning an independent review of the science relevant to the management of the Lower Lakes. The Terms of Reference for the review were discussed and the role of ACSEES agreed.

The Committee was briefed on the MDBA's approach to the 2020 Basin Plan evaluation, which will be an important measure of progress towards the specific objectives of the Basin Plan at a time when many Basin Plan milestones will be in place, including water resource plans. ACSEES members provided advice on how the evaluation methodology could be improved.

Members noted the importance of incorporating social and economic indicators as well as the environmental science in all of the MDBA's work, and their expectation that the important work currently underway by the Independent Socio-Economic Panel will provide valuable insights to inform both the 2020 evaluation and future work.

The importance and role of hydrologic modelling for the MDBA's work was discussed at length, with a briefing provided about the MDBA's team of modellers operations alongside state agencies

to appropriately test and validate their methods. The reported lack of trust in the models among some groups was noted as a matter of concern. ACSEES members encouraged the modelling team to make greater efforts to build public confidence in the models by extending their public outreach.

ACSEES members also welcomed a briefing about data management and agreed on the importance of the steps to improve transparency around the MDBA's use and collection of data in the Basin. They also welcomed the positive findings of the independent review into the Sustainable Diversion Limits (SDL) accounting framework.

More information about ACSEES is available on the MDBA website at www.mdba.gov.au/about-us/governance/advisory-committee-social-economic-environmental-sciences.