



ACSEES

Advisory Committee on Social, Economic and Environmental Sciences

INDEPENDENT ADVICE ON BASIN SCIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE

COMMUNIQUE

28-29 May 2020

A range of science issues continue to be the focus of the Murray–Darling Basin Authority’s work, and as such are referred to ACSEES for guidance to ensure the agency’s approach and methodology remain best practice.

Climate change will be the major stressor for future Murray–Darling Basin policy reform. This is a fundamental consideration for the MDBA and all governments. Even though there remain uncertainties in our understanding of how climate change will play out, we encourage the MDBA to deepen and accelerate the climate change program already underway, working in lockstep with other relevant agencies and basin governments.

Significant hydroclimatic shifts are already evident and future scenarios indicate that water scarcity in the Basin will be more serious and prolonged than in the past. We note the Bureau of Meteorology has been engaged to document recent hydroclimatic changes and that the CSIRO has prepared a set of possible climate scenarios. The MDBA—along with basin governments—needs to plan for and communicate the more serious of these.

It is important that future work includes localisation of the climate change story for regions and water users, so the envisaged impacts and adaptation options resonate with local communities and industries. Most of the Basin states are undertaking their own climate change analysis and we recommend the MDBA synthesise this work where possible to assist communities adapt to a shifting and largely deteriorating hydroclimatic regime.

ACSEES welcomes the work underway on the difficult task to evaluate Basin Plan progress. Of note is the challenge to pinpoint the cause and effect of many variables involved in this complex and uncontrolled environment. The collaborative approach used by the MDBA is to be encouraged and a well-resourced monitoring and evaluation strategy that manages future work is advisable, in advance of the 2026 Basin Plan review. We recommend peer review of the evaluation’s various components once they are drafted and support the establishment of expert panels to ensure rigour in this process.

The report of the independent panel looking into socio-economic conditions in the Basin, the draft of which ACSEES has reviewed, is to be applauded. We acknowledge that many concerns regarding regional decline are universal and communities in the Basin face issues in common with agricultural communities outside the Basin and even internationally. We look forward to a future whole-of-government response that does justice to the work of

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the panel. There is undoubted value in independent assessments to inform sensible public dialogue on issues affecting the Basin and ACSEES stands ready to assist to develop best practise approaches for future representational or expert reviews.

The MDBA's recent use of remote sensing to track the hydrology of floodplain harvesting is a clear example of strong Commonwealth and state collaboration to shed light on science that is of interest to the general public. We are confident there is a net public benefit in greater exposure and scrutiny of this work and would welcome its steady development by the MDBA, including guidance on how users might consider and accurately interpret the information.

In the context of COVID-19, we are pleased the advisory committee's engagement has continued online and uninterrupted. The next meeting of ACSEES is anticipated for late 2020.

Professor Rob Vertessy (Chair), School of Engineering, University of Melbourne

Professor Poh-Ling Tan, International Water Centre, Griffith University

Professor Nick Bond, Centre for Freshwater Ecosystems, La Trobe University

Professor Sue Jackson, Australian Rivers Institute, Griffith University

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More information about ACSEES is available on the MDBA website at mdba.gov.au/acsees

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