



ACSEES

Advisory Committee on Social, Economic and Environmental Sciences

INDEPENDENT ADVICE ON BASIN SCIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE

COMMUNIQUE

15-16 September 2020

A meeting of the Advisory Committee on Social, Economic and Environmental Sciences (ACSEES) was held virtually on 15-16 September 2020. Professor Roger Stone was an apology for the meeting. The meeting was chaired by Professor Rob Vertessy.

The committee formally welcomed their newest member, Associate Professor Rebecca Nelson who joins for a three- year term. Associate Professor Nelson, Melbourne Law School, University of Melbourne, has Australian and international expertise in environmental engineering and law relating to water and natural resources. Her skills will add significantly to the pool of knowledge and experience held by ACSEES members.

Members thanked out-going ACSEES member Professor Poh-Ling Tan of Griffith University for her extremely valuable contribution, especially in water governance, legal and analytical work. She had served ACSEES since 2013.

The MDBA's newly appointed chair, Sir Angus Houston joined the opening session of the meeting and emphasised his commitment to open and genuine collaboration and building relationships based on trust. ACSEES members welcomed Sir Angus' remarks on the significance of climate change for the future of the Basin, including his remarks concerning the vital role of science in informing future policy responses.

The MDBA CEO, Philip Glyde, briefed ACSEES members on the Australian Government's \$7.5m investment to bolster efforts to monitor the social-economic and environmental conditions in the Basin. Water Minister Keith Pitt announced the funding as part of his [Murray-Darling Communities Investment Package](#) in early September. ACSEES members were pleased to see that the package included new investments in community engagement, monitoring and evaluation and support for further scoping of river basin model improvements. For some time, ACSEES has been recommending additional efforts in all of these areas.

ACSEES received briefings on the MDBA's regionalisation process, economic research undertaken by ABARES, the Commonwealth-funded Murray Darling Water and Environment Research Program, climate adaptation research undertaken by CSIRO and Bureau of Meteorology, and the Basin Plan Evaluation 2020. Members noted that all of these initiatives have significant potential to improve Basin outcomes.

A significant outcome of the MDBA-sponsored research on climate change adaptation has been the finalisation of a Bureau of Meteorology report on observed climate change within the Basin and a CSIRO report on climate change futures. These studies will be of value in planning climate

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change adaptation policies in the basin. ACSEES members recommended building upon these studies by providing greater clarity on likely future changes and how these will impact specific industries and sub-regions of the Basin.

ACSEES members reflected on the last two years of activity relating to the Basin Plan Evaluation 2020 and provided advice on how to improve future evaluations.

Science will continue to play a critical role in the future of the Basin as we strive to learn and understand the interplay between hydrology, ecology, climate change and communities. An important part of any strategy to actively address the Basin's current and future needs will be to arm communities with the right knowledge and connect the community to the science. As such, members emphasised that science communication must play a central role, especially to explain the challenges of the changing climate faced by Murray–Darling Basin communities, industries and ecosystems.

As the COVID19 pandemic continues to place restrictions on travel, we are pleased to continue coming together effectively online to further our contribution to the MDBA's work. The next formal ACSEES meeting is anticipated for early 2021.

ENDS

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

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

Professor Sue Jackson, Australian Rivers Institute, Griffith University

Adjunct Professor Neil Byron, Institute of Applied Ecology, University of Canberra

Professor Michael Stewardson, Environmental Hydrology and Water Resources Group, University of Melbourne

Associate Professor Rebecca Nelson, School of Law, University of Melbourne

Apology: Professor Roger Stone, Centre for Applied Climate Sciences, University of Southern Queensland

Contact: ACSEES via the MDBA Media office at media@mdba.gov.au or 02 6279 0141

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

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