

Socio-Economic Assessment of Murray-Darling Basin Submission Template

Submission Number 003

1. What organisation (if relevant) are you from?
[REDACTED]

2. Please enter your first name
[REDACTED]

3. Please enter your email
[REDACTED]

Bring communities back to the heart of conversations and action that decide their future

This section encompasses the following categories:

- Governments must rebuild community trust in water reform, and lead from the front
- Current funding is not enough to support community led transitions for Basin communities impacted by water reform
- Socioeconomic neutrality criteria should be accompanied by a process to provide flexibility for communities to move to less water dependent futures where communities request this

4. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the Panel's key findings and recommendations, and why? Please provide as much detail as possible.

Agree with Rec 1. Many people in the Northern Basin have very uninformed opinions about water and much of the debate and discussion is dominated almost entirely by a small number of very influential large volume irrigators. If more people in the Basin understood water policy, planning and management better, a better balanced view would emerge and the system would be much better off. Agree with Rec 3 as climate and other factors directly influence what can and cannot be achieved in the Basin. It will take several years for people in the Northern Basin to recover from the last severe dry period. Whilst I agree with Rec 4, it has no fertile ground unless governments at all levels develop and agree an overarching policy about rural Australia and agriculture in particular. The market approach and current economic approach lies around letting unviable communities wither and die for the sake of economic efficiency. Get big or get out is the standard catch cry in Canberra and other capital cities. So this recommendation is not likely to go anywhere simply because at this stage, small disadvantaged and unviable existing communities are not on any government's agenda. Given the 20 year data says rainfall in the Northern Basin has declined by 40% average annualised resulting in about 60% less inflows, the more powerful voices will continue to dominate discussions about water and it is highly unlikely smaller communities will get their voice heard. Rec 5 is agreed provided the community leadership is informed by rational and evidence based information and knowledge and not by sectional interests.

5. Are there any significant gaps? What are we missing?

The biggest gaps in almost everything being done in the Murray Darling Basin lies around the continuing approach to treat the System as one homogenous thing. The Darling System is completely different to the Murray system at nearly every level. Treating it the same in a policy sense is nuts.

6. If implemented, do you think our recommendations would make a difference or have a benefit to you and/or your community?

If the whole water debate in the Northern Basin was informed and the community voice was balanced and not monopolised by one sector, the recommendations have a good chance of making a real and lasting difference.

Meet the pressing needs of First Nations

This section encompasses the following categories:

- More needs to be done to improve social, cultural and economic outcomes for First Nations communities

7. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the Panel's key findings and recommendations, and why? Please provide as much detail as possible.

Definitely support the three recommendations, on the strong proviso that the recommendations apply to direct negotiations with the representative entities, and the Nations as well as First People communities. The Basin has a couple of nation representative groups.

[Redacted]

8. Are there any significant gaps? What are we missing?

Many Aboriginal Nations have knowledge which will be invaluable in looking after the Basin and its communities and economies. This knowledge is based on unique intellectual property which has been taken by universities and others to develop new and innovative products and services which in some cases has been patented in recent years. This patent work can then exclude Nations from practicing culture through western law frameworks. The result, is many Aboriginal people have little to no trust in Western process, ;laws and entities. In all the involvement outlined in the three recommendatons, it is critical that First People's IP is respected and appropriately managed.

9. If implemented, do you think our recommendations would make a difference or have a benefit to you and/or your community?

Some of the most disadvantaged communities in the Northern Basin are Aboriginal communities. If the recommendations were implemented in a culturally appropriate way, it would be life changing for many.

Implement water reform with greater care so potential harms are minimised

This section encompasses the following categories:

- From this point on, governments should match the pace of all further water recovery to the capacity of systems and communities to absorb and adjust change
- Basin communities need greater clarity around river operations
- The quality, timeliness and awareness of indicators related to wellbeing and the environment need to be better
- Research and innovation need more focus on helping farm businesses transition to flexible farming systems
- Moving towards more sustainable irrigation infrastructure

10. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the Panel's key findings and recommendations, and why? Please provide as much detail as possible.

Agree with the recommendations. It has taken 30-40 years for the Northern Basin to become way over-allocated with new and very expensive infrastructure as a result of successive government policy and management failures. It is unfair to expect the beneficiaries of these failures to have to adjust in only a few short years.

11. Are there any significant gaps? What are we missing?

While irrigators hold a massively disproportionate say and influence on Basin policy and use this influence to control the opinions in many communities, it is not their decision-making which has caused much of the current situation in the Northern Basin. Ensuring they are given real assistance from their points of view to move to a sustainable approach will require strong monitoring and evaluation. The various governments must take responsibility for their part in the current situation and reconsider their own policy and management approaches to recovery based on this monitoring information.

12. If implemented, do you think our recommendations would make a difference or have a benefit to you and/or your community?

The Northern Basin will gain massively through a considered approach to getting the rivers back to health. The changed climate will continue to lessen water and force massive practice change and if done in an inclusive way, will help our communities immensely.

Support the capacity of communities to adapt to change

This section encompasses the following categories:

- Basin communities need greater clarity around river operations
- The quality, timeliness and awareness of indicators related to wellbeing and the environment need to be better
- The Australia Government needs to further invest in regional connectivity in the Basin

13. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the Panel's key findings and recommendations, and why? Please provide as much detail as possible.

Recommendations are supported. Again, because the irrigator voice drowns out most other voices in the Basin, little is done to look after communities, businesses, First People, the environment as it relates to the flow targets, let alone the overall landscape and community aspirations unless it results in a benefit aligned to irrigated agriculture and system flows. While the Basin Plan does its best to deal with issues related to flow, most people in the basin live in

landscapes and communities where flow is not very relevant to their day to day lives. Modern society expects water security for human consumption in Australia. A recent example in one sizable community, for example, saw the Local Government declaring several hundred megalitres as surplus and made available for purchase by an irrigator, while at the same time seeing the township of several thousand people on strong water restrictions. For them it is about livelihoods, wellbeing, health, equity and education. There is only a small intersection between water planning and many of these things if the measures and targets only relate to a flow outcome.

14. Are there any significant gaps? What are we missing?

Getting the agreement of the irrigators in the Northern Basin will be critical. The implied transparency and evidence based approach required to implement the recommendations is likely to fail unless the sector is comfortable.

15. If implemented, do you think our recommendations would make a difference or have a benefit to you and/or your community?

They would make a huge difference if implemented.

Address critical and urgent gaps in wellbeing, infrastructure and services

This section encompasses the following categories:

- The Australian Government needs to further invest in regional connectivity in the Basin
- Basin regions and towns facing acute social and economic issues needs immediate support

16. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the Panel's key findings and recommendations, and why? Please provide as much detail as possible.

Recommendations supported as they could result in new business and industry in the Basin as well as improve wellbeing and equity.

17. Are there any significant gaps? What are we missing?

18. If implemented, do you think our recommendations would make a difference or have a benefit to you and/or your community?

If implemented, they would address a lot of what we hear from our communities in the Northern Basin. again, if the governments have no coherent policy or programs to have people in the bush part of the Basin, these recommendations have little chance. The current economics will rule out the recommendations in the Northern Basin given the reliance on leaving everything to market forces.