

## Socio-Economic Assessment of Murray-Darling Basin Submission Template

### Submission Number 016 Attachment

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

██████████

2. Please enter your first name

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3. Please enter your email

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### **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.

Support the recommendations noting that more needs to be done and that with the benefit of hindsight, processes could have been improved and investment better targeted. That said, it needs to be understood that Murray Darling Basin Plan was and still is a big undertaking and there was an immediate need for action. Against a background of having taken action, we can now analyse its effectiveness while not losing sight of the fact that the pressure placed on the system by the millennium drought highlighted an urgent need for change. Now is the time to galvanise a vision across the basin states and all tiers of government. More importantly, it is time for working with communities to develop place based approaches that extend beyond (without excluding) dedicated support to the irrigation industry. Striking the right balance between strategic, targeted action and flexibility needs to focus more on the intended outcomes rather than the delivery of a particular output; the solution shouldn't become more important than the problem that is trying to be solved.

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

As noted in section 2.2 of the report, aggregation of data can hide areas of significant socio-economic disadvantage and vulnerability. It may be more appropriate for the Murray Darling Basin Economic Development Program to preference projects that address vulnerability rather than restricting the criteria to a subset of regions.

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

Yes, if governments are going to rebuild trust there needs to be a commitment to the Plan and a mature approach to working with communities to ensure they can navigate the change and plan for the future.

## **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.  
Support the recommendations. In the same way that capacity building is important for the rest of the community, it is important that First Nations People are able to participate in the opportunities afforded as part of the Murray Darling Basin Plan and broader water reforms. Better understanding the cultural and economic benefits of improving First Nations groups access to water and environmental outcomes appears to be a sound platform to build from.
8. Are there any significant gaps? What are we missing?
9. If implemented, do you think our recommendations would make a difference or have a benefit to you and/or your community?  
Yes, better understanding First Nations culture and creating opportunities for that exchange through environmental and economic outcomes provides an avenue for better social connectivity across the community.

## **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.  
Recommendations supported. In terms of the life cycle of the Murray Darling Basin Plan, it makes sense that the approach should become more sophisticated. This should be considered as a process of continued improvement and refinement. Where there have unintended and perverse impacts it makes sense to redesign delivery address the shortcomings. In many respects the recommendations build on the theme of restoring trust in governments; clarity and transparency with regard to the progress of the Plan and intended future outcomes are important elements in the process. Earlier and better informed announcements on water allocations for the forthcoming water year are acknowledged as welcome practice already initiated in South Australia. The recommendation with regard to Research and Innovation warrants particular attention and should perhaps go a step further to advocate for greater in region capacity to facilitate the increased focus and demonstrate the value.

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

The recommendation with regard to Research and Innovation warrants particular attention and should perhaps go a step further to advocate for greater in region capacity to facilitate the increased focus and demonstrate the value. The centralised approach to Research and Innovation in Australia has created.

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

### **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 supported. Community resilience and well-being are critical to the survival and prosperity of towns. Education, skill development, social infrastructure, digital connectivity and the natural and build environment all play a role in building capability and capacity within a community. Social indicators and changes within the demographic are important to tracking and responding to the needs of a community. Importantly, any information captured and presented needs to be done so in a manner that respects the corporate knowledge and leadership credentials that already exist. The provision of timely information and forecasts allow businesses and community leaders to consider available options in response.

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

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

### **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 need 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. While the investment in water recovery, including on-farm irrigation, has provided economic stimulus there is a need for a holistic approach to regional development. Water is among many changes facing regional communities and there are broader issues such as access to services, amenity, connectivity and interactions with the natural and build environment that influence where people wish to live and invest. What needs to be

understood is that water, on top of the other prevailing trends is creating a disruption that will challenge even the most resilient community. Again, there is strong argument here to suggest that governments should be working with regional communities to establish placed based initiatives that build on existing strengths and facilitate future opportunities.

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?

Yes, lack of access to mobile phone and internet coverage is an impediment to economic growth and contributes to social isolation. Likewise, the link to services is critical to the prospects of towns.