

Socio-Economic Assessment of Murray-Darling Basin Submission Template

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

██████████

2. Please enter your first name

██████

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.

In Moira Shire the majority of our economy is reliant on agriculture and horticulture. The dairy industry in particular established a large manufacturing presence in Cobram and Strathmerton which is now at risk due to the loss of farms and the consequent reduction milk production. Since 2000 GMID dairy farm and cow numbers have declined by 62% and 48% respectively, with milk production by 40%, which shows that the farm sector is facing major challenges. The Panel's key findings assume that the Plan is an overall positive for our community. The reality is, to quote Robbie Sefton the Chair of the Independent Panel "We heard from people caught in a one-way conversation, over-consulted and under-listened to". Moira Shire's agricultural (in particular dairying) and horticulture industries have been subject to an enormous and largely uncompensated adjustment brought about by climatic conditions, problematic government intervention into the water industry. The "freed-up" trade in water has resulted in much of the productive land in Moira Shire been "dried off". This has undermined the \$2 billion investment by the Victorian Government in GMID water infrastructure. In addition, this has forced adjustment in formerly productive irrigation country: to water almonds in the arid zone and to enable 900 giga-litres of environmental water to complete the water cycle (evaporate) in Lake Alexandrina. Before the Plan, the Murray Goulburn region was a totally sustainable an irrigation district thanks to the extra 2,100 gigitalitres of water diversion from the Snowy Mountains scheme. The boom bust Murray River flows of the past are now history thanks to nation building works such as the Snowy Mountains Scheme that not only provides a constant environmental flow but, before wide spread water trading was introduced, provided 1600 GL (now 900) of Goulburn Murray Water irrigation allocation to support Australia's biggest dairying region. Good work by our farmers, supported by the Government, had improved irrigation and drainage, whilst dramatically reducing salinity and improving the outcome for fish, birds and other wildlife. The management of the Darling system is a different story, with little effort put into efficient storage (Menindee Lake being a regulated shallow lake) and over-allocation in the Northern Basin. Lake Alexandrina with up to 900 giga-litres a year completing the water cycle

(evaporating) in a failed attempt to keep an estuarine lake fresh is in our view a problematic use of a scarce and valuable water resource. An open and transparent investigation needs to be undertaken into the whole Murray Darling Basin, based on the Snowy principle of maximizing the benefit to the people, economy and environment in that order. The Australian Governments Water Act 2007 Part 1-Preliminary 3 Objects states that (c)...in giving effect to those agreements, to promote the use and management of the Basin water resources in a way that optimizes economic, social and environmental outcomes. Moira Shire would have emphasized the social (people) and economic values, as we believe a thriving community and environment must have thriving economy.

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

The gap in this conversation is that the plan was developed around the environmental outcomes predicated on saving the Murray Darling Basin with little regard to the economy and people who work and live in its catchment. The 450GL UpWater proposal would only further disadvantage our irrigation communities by further diminishing the pool of high value irrigation water.

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

Recommendation 1 seeks our support in implementing a plan that has already had major negative social and economic impacts on our irrigation communities and environmental impacts on the ecology of the Barmah forest due to unseasonal overbank watering. Recommendation 19 seeks to provide front line service providers that specialize in addressing household distress, mental health issues, and financial hardship in recognition that some major damage has occurred to Basin communities. The actions suggested in Recommendations 16, 17 and 20 are a sign of a search for a solution to a problem caused by government removing a key component (water) from Basin communities. You cannot have a thriving community without a thriving economy.

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.

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

It would be better to base the Murray Darling Plan on the Victorian Goulburn Murray Basin model, with modern river regulation and a previously conservative management regime, rather than the free market approach adopted in the Darling system, with poor quality regulation and over-allocation.

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

Conversations about change are valuable, however Basin communities are weary after 20 years of talk and minimal action from governments. As the Chair of the Panel has stated, "Through our assessment, the panel has seen first-hand the uneven impact of this lack of shared vision. Morale has eroded, and a sense of hopelessness is spreading; in many cases, people no longer

feel confident in the future.” Neither Melbourne nor Sydney communities would not tolerate the extent to which Basin communities’ economy have contracted.

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.

Moira Shire would definitely support Recommendation 2 regarding slowing the water recovery in the Basin. Moira Shire is totally opposed to works to improve the capacity of the Barmah Choke by removing capacity constraints in water delivery, as per Recommendation 2 and 6. This is not in the Moira community’s best interest, because it enables the corporate sector to further remove water from our efficient irrigation districts to long term unsustainable operations downstream.

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

12. Water is an essential for life and economic prosperity. The contraction of the irrigation industry and the turning of vast tracts of irrigated land back to dry land, is an economic negative. No matter how this is presented by Government, most Basin people recognize this fact and feel let down.

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

Moira Shire is starting to see some major corporate interest to develop big horticultural and agricultural enterprises. These interests realize that the modernized irrigation systems above the Barmah Choke and being located near the source of the Goulburn and Murray rivers, are more sustainable in the long-term.

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

14. 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.

15. Recommendation 7 has merit because towns and regional cities do need a secure, expandable water supply. Much work has been done in this regard such as the Bendigo water grid in Victoria. Non-urban populations also need access to good quality water. Moira Shire has worked with partners to deliver the Tungamah Stock and Domestic water supply scheme that piped an inefficient channel system to give farmers and local towns access to a good quality water supply.
16. Are there any significant gaps? What are we missing?
17. The tracking of key indicators to community and environmental health as indicated in Recommendation 12, 13 and 14, will give Government and communities a clearer understanding of what is really happening due to changes brought about by implementation of the plan.
18. If implemented, do you think our recommendations would make a difference or have a benefit to you and/or your community?
The recommendations dealing with increased investment by Government in better resourcing our local communities are good, as is the desire to consult more on the effects of the plan. Governments should respond to the criticisms of the Plan.

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
19. 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.
 20. Moira Shire agrees that regional communities should be given greater support by the Government as per Recommendations 4, 16, 19. Infrastructure to provide for the efficient distribution of water to these communities is very desirable. Digital connection, better educational, health and recreational infrastructure, are also very valuable. This requires a vibrant growing community. The most vibrant communities in low rainfall areas (most of the Basin) are one's that have sufficient water to support irrigated agriculture/horticulture and the processing and logistics industries that go with them.
 21. Are there any significant gaps? What are we missing?
 22. If implemented, do you think our recommendations would make a difference or have a benefit to you and/or your community?