



Barunggam, Bidjara, Bigambul, Budjiti, Euahlayi, Giabel, Githabul, Gomeroi (Kamilaroi), Gunggari (Kungarri), Guwamu (Kooma), Jarowair, Kambuwal, Kunja, Kwiambal, Maljangapa, Mandandanji, Mardigan, Murrawarri, Ngemba, Ngiyampaa, Wayilwan, Wakka Wakka

Chairperson

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Sunday, 5 April 2020

Submission to the Independent Panel on Social and Economic Conditions in the
Murray Darling Basin:

Dear Panel.

Firstly thank you for the opportunity to make submission on the draft report.

We thank you for your recommendations and findings and make the following submission.

Acknowledgement:

We feel that acknowledgement lacks recognising that First Nations people have a long history of trade within the Murray Darling Basin. Nations traded goods and services well before colonisation and this should be recognised in such a paper or report.

First Nations Population:

The report highlight in Draft finding 5 on page 27, that there are around 75,000 First Nations people who live and work in the Murray Darling Basin, however there is no breakup of the Northern and Southern Basin.

We agree that the Population is under represented within the Census System. In a project that was undertake by NBAN we believe that the number could be out by at least 150% it not even more. We can provide the Committee with evidence of this disparity in Population Numbers in the Northern Murray Darling Basin.

Below are Census data considerations which is an extract from a project we completed in 2017 in relation to the development of Northern Basin Economic Development Strategy¹.

“The ABS acknowledge that there is disparity in the data collected from the census, and the actual number of Aboriginal people living in communities. Efforts continue to be made to correct these anomalies, particularly in areas where significant disparities are known to exist. In some communities, it is recognised that as many as half the population may not have participated in the census collection. Given this, it is important to see the data as a guide, rather than as highly accurate.

*The following information provides an example of this:
The NBAN area includes the Far West ABS statistical area which includes an ill-defined area, but does include Wilcannia and Menindee, Pooncarie, White Cliffs, Tibooburra and Packsaddle. There is evidence that there is extreme disparity in the ATSI data for this area.*

By example there are over 310 ATSI players registered in the outback Rugby League competition, and a further 89 registered ATSI volunteers in that one region’s sport group. There are an additional 50 people registered with netball and other clubs and this is just within the youth demographic.

There are over 320 ATSI people known to be living in the Wilcannia community area alone. There are 433 ATSI enrolled students in the three communities of Broken Hill, Menindee and Wilcannia.

The above is an example where ATSI school enrolments alone in these three communities, exceeds the ABS reported youth population for by over 300%.

Not being able to access more accurate data, precludes more precise figures being obtained across the whole NBAN region at this time. One hypothesis is that this project will assist in strengthening information about the actual residence status within Aboriginal communities across our NBAN region, through the requirement of the TREATY for member Nations to conduct surveys and record population statistics which will be conducted in a more appropriate manner related to First Nations census collection. It will also provide support to identify and record their aspirations toward economic self-management over time, and support them in managing their Nation’s priority outcomes.

For the purposes of this proposal, we can assume that there is underreporting of ABS ATSI population data by an estimated 150%.”

¹ NBAN Submission to fund the Economic Development Strategy for First Nations of the Northern Murray Darling Basin.

Meet the pressing needs of First Nations

We welcome the panel's assessment that the following are pressing needs within the Basin. However, NBAN feels that without real economic development for First Nation and their peoples in the Northern Basin, the words in this report will diminish into darkness, and will not become a priority of Governments, leaving First Nations peoples still living in Economic Poverty.

Clearly for Governments to listen we need stronger wording in this section. We would recommend the following changes in red in each point.

- Do more to increase First Nations communities' access to water for cultural and economic purposes (Draft recommendation 9). **Governments as a priority should increase First Nations and their people's access to water for economic and social purposes).**
- **(Governments should fund)** First Nations groups to work with experts in valuing ecosystem services at culturally significant sites (including, but not limited to, the 17 Ramsar sites in the Basin). (Draft recommendation 10).
- **(First Nations participation should be embedded into water policy development at all levels of Government.)** Work to better embed and mainstream First Nations participation in water policy and planning at all levels over the long term (Draft recommendation 11)

Support the capacity of communities to adapt to change:

NBAN supports what is proposed at point 4, however we believe that this has to be one entity to ensure continuity during the collection of data which will make reporting and data collection easier.

Recommendation One:

We welcome the recommendation and the need to have community involvement. We feel that this recommendation should also have a reference to First Nations involvement. We feel that there should be also some wording around First Nations Law/Lore around water literacy.

Recommendation Two:

We welcome this recommendation and believe that the Government should look at further levels of water recovery for the environment and look at other alternative industries that will aid in achieving better outcomes for basin communities including First Nations communities.

Recommendation Three:

NBAN supports this recommendation.

Recommendation Four:

NBAN believes that there should be an extra point added to this recommendation which could look something like this: **(The Governments should work with NBAN and MLDRIN to develop two First Nations Economic Development Future Funds for the Basin)**. One in the North and one in the South. These funds could be set up and financed on a basis where a percentage of all water licences (say 20%) in the States should be accredited to the future funds over say 15 years. The Commonwealth should also contribute to the establishment of the Future Funds.

Recommendation Eight:

This recommendation is confusing. In the main recommendation it says that the government should invest in other sources of water supply and ask for a pilot project to be developed. Later it talks about First Nations involvement in water reform. It looks like it is a part of Recommendation Eight, but we don't think it is. We think that there needs to be more separation of recommendation Eight and the explanation of Recommendation Nine.

Recommendation Nine:

NBAN supports this recommendation.

Recommendation 10:

NBAN supports this recommendation however we feel that First Nations should be the driver of this particular work on Ecosystems valuing. First Nations peak bodies like NBAN and MLDRIN should be the ones who receive these funds and choose which partners they should work with. NBAN also believes that First Nations data Sovereignty should be at the heart of any work around this area and it should be reinforced in this recommendation.

Recommendation 11:

NBAN also support this recommendation, however, it should go further to say that the National Water Act should be changed to ensure First Nations involvement in Policy at both the State and Federal Level should be mandatory.

Recommendation 12:

NBAN supports this recommendation.

Recommendation 13:

Again as in Recommendation 10 we support the recommendation, however, it should be First Nations controlled through a Nation by Nation process.

Recommendation 14:

Again NBAN supports this recommendation.

Recommendation 15:

NBAN supports this recommendation, however there should also be a focus on First Nation Agriculture and Horticulture.

Recommendation 16:

Again NBAN supports this recommendation as long as all infrastructure program follow the Commonwealth Procurement guidelines and eligible spend is negotiated.

Recommendation 17:

Again we support his recommendation. As said previously we believe there should also be a First Nations future funds established in both the Northern and Southern Basin.

Recommendation 18:

NBAN supports this recommendation.

Recommendation 19:

We support this recommendation, however, we believe that there should be a study of First Nations people's financial hardship, mental health and household stress so that they can be added into the front line services that will be provided if this recommendation is adopted by Government.

Recommendation 20:

NBAN is currently working on a Nation Planning process with Nations to establish what the economic needs of the Nations is. We have also done some work in terms of a First Nations Economic Development Strategy within the northern Basin. We support this recommendation and agree that there needs to be long term planning, however this planning should not be changed at the will of Government like the requirements around water recovery for the environment. These plans should be regionalised with First Nations input and decision making processes.

Conclusion:

Overall NBAN feels that the report gives an accurate picture of the social and economic conditions of the Basin. Change has become the norm now with the emergency that is gripping the country, the drought and its impacts in the Murray Darling Basin on the introduced crops. We also understand that the MDB is not immuned from this current crisis, and that our First Nations and their peoples will feel the full brunt of this crisis both in terms of the social aspect and the economics, however, we feel that there is a great opportunity when this is all over a new First Nations industry to emerge, through First Nations Agriculture and through Environment projects within the basin.

Fred Hooper
Chairperson
Northern Basin Aboriginal Nations