

[Submission Number 050](#)

What organisation (if relevant) are you from?

Community member

Please enter your first name:

██████

Please enter your email address:

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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.

I support Recommendation 1. Governments have been very parochial in their approach to water reform, taking into account only what they perceive as being in the best interest of their own communities. They often fail to see the connections between upstream and downstream, rivers and floodplains, ecological health and economic strength. Governments must act with transparency and candour and act in the national interest. A healthy river system benefits everyone, not just certain communities. Recommendation 2 is a mixed bag. I am strongly opposed to slowing the pace of water recovery, which has already ground to a virtual standstill over the last couple of years. There is a 47GL shortfall in water recovery against legislated 'bridging the gap' targets that should have been met on 30 June 2019. This shortfall, the majority of which is in Queensland and NSW catchments, must be recovered as a matter of urgency, preferably by open tender buyback. The second part of Recommendation 2 concerning delivery constraints is strongly supported. All delivery constraints, particularly those that impede the delivery of environmental water, need to be addressed, and are essential for the benefits of supply projects under the SDLAM to be realised. I support Recommendations 3 and 4. Recommendation 5 is problematic. The Panel is correct that the socio-economic test is highly restrictive and potentially unworkable, and worthwhile projects may be rejected as a result. The solution is to fix the test and return to the principles in the Water Act and Basin Plan, not to devise yet another complex process.

Are there any significant gaps? What are we missing?

Governments are not wholly to blame for problems in water reform. The Basin Plan has been under attack in some sections of the community since day one, and has been constantly questioned and undermined by those who see it as detrimental to their interests. The point of water reform and the need to address over-allocation and revive our rivers is constantly lost under the weight of these objections. As Margaret Simons points out in her recent Quarterly Essay, there is little sense of community extending across the Basin, although local communities are strong. It is really difficult for people to appreciate the bigger picture, but this is what needs to happen. Upstream needs to appreciate downstream and vice versa.

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.

I strongly support the recommendations for First Nations and their right to access water

Are there any significant gaps? What are we missing?

The protection of Ramsar sites and the provision of ecosystem services are foundational concepts in the Water Act and Basin Plan, yet in this report they only get a mention in relation to First Nations. They are crucially important to all Australians and the continuation of agriculture depends on the ecosystem services supplied by healthy rivers and wetlands.

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.

The recommendation to slow water recovery to the pace at which communities can adapt misses the urgency of halting the ecological decline of our rivers. Recent events in the northern basin and the joy and excitement with which the return of water to the Darling has been greeted indicate the essential importance of healthy rivers to the entire community, not just irrigators. The combination of drought and extraction, particularly of low flows, had driven those rivers to the brink and potentially over the brink of ecological collapse from which there is no return. This is why water recovery is urgent and non-negotiable. I support the need for better monitoring of both community wellbeing and environmental outcomes. The wellbeing of communities has been severely affected by drought, and as Jackie Schirmer points out in her report to the Panel, it has not been possible to distinguish the impacts of drought from the impacts of water reform. Likewise we cannot distinguish the impacts of the operation of the water market from environmental water recovery, and the Basin Plan is a convenient whipping boy for community distress. Environmental recovery from decades of over-extraction of water takes time and the benefits may take years to become apparent. It is fair to say that to date there have been some great local success stories for environmental watering in local wetlands and river reaches, for example improved fish breeding in the lower Goulburn, but the system wide benefits are yet to be seen. This may be due to the fact that water recovery is not yet sufficient, the drought, third party impacts of water trade or the fact that it is still early days in Basin Plan implementation and the science and practice of environmental watering is still in its infancy, or a combination of all of these factors. Only good monitoring will tell.

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.

Recommendation 14 is important. There has been very little tracking of the positive benefits of improved environmental condition as a result of water recovery, or of how sectors other than irrigation have responded. We know for example that the return of water to the Wimmera River following the end of the Millennium drought brought an increase in business to towns along the river and an increase in property values. We do not know if the provision of environmental flows since 2010 has helped maintain those economic benefits. I support recommendations 7 and 8 on town water supply. Supplying critical human needs is an essential part of the Basin Plan but one

that is often neglected. If we get more water in our rivers towns will be more secure. The recent experience of towns along the Darling illustrates this point perfectly.

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.

I support these recommendations. Investment in irrigation infrastructure should not be the only form of structural adjustment available to Basin communities. Investment in other areas of identified need will produce much greater returns