



**The Goulburn Valley Environment Group Inc.**

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## **Basin Socio-Economic Assessment Panel**

### **Comments on draft findings and recommendations**

Goulburn Valley Environment Group (GVEG) would like to take this opportunity **to endorse and highly recommend to the Independent Panel the submission from the Lifeblood Alliance.**

The Lifeblood Alliance submission is the compilation of views and concerns of groups and individuals from across the length and breadth of the Basin, however GVEG would appreciate the following more localised comments to also be taken into account by the Panel.

Whilst appreciating the limited time frame and the political origins of the Socio-Economic Assessment, GVEG was disappointed with public consultation which has encouraged biased research, failed to fully understand the complex drivers of rural change and discouraged contrary views to irrigation industry interests.

The increasing dependence of rural economies on tourism, recreation and service industries and the dependence of many of these industries on healthy working rivers does not carry sufficient weight in the Draft Reports findings and recommendations.

There are examples of local government economies now being more reliant on tourism than agricultural industries and this doesn't consider the huge growth into service industries across the Basin. There appears to be little accounting of tourism industry issues regarding the deteriorating river health of the lower Darling and the Murray Rivers.

We believe references to managing constraints in the Draft Report are confusing and biased. Emphasis appears unduly favouring issues applying to irrigation deliveries, below the Barmah Choke for example, and insufficient to the delivery of environmental flows. A well planned and resourced campaign by those opposed to the Basin Plan has stalled all work by the States on the removal of these constraints.

Whilst compensation to those landholders impacted by the removal of constraints is supported by GVEG this clearly was not the case in past with resource entitlements freely handed out for irrigation. Impacts to floodplain grazing and other industries, town water supplies, First Nations and the natural environment were at the time ignored.

While the Draft Report considers some of the positive and negative impacts of water trading and types of water recovery, it fails to properly assess the social and economic impacts of environmental outcomes of water reform. Our local Goulburn River is experiencing real social and environmental impacts of water reforms, in particular unrestricted water trading to downstream developments. These are again classic third party impacts that have been conveniently ignored by State government's intent on economic growth.

GVEG supports recommendations to improve engagement with and understanding of First Nations connection to country. This is long overdue with little evidence of First Nations representatives and interests being taken seriously in the past. We wait for the long promised MDBA Board appointment to come about.

With much of the consultation time in the Southern Basin being taken up with allocation policy, entitlement rights and just "where has the bloody water gone" GVEG hoped the Panel may have considered an Audit of Water entitlements and deliveries as assisting in facilitating community understanding water reform, transparency and the Basin Plan.

GVEG hopes this feedback will assist in refining the findings and recommendations in the Panels final Report.

Yours sincerely,

John Pettigrew, GVEG President