

To whom this may concern,

Please accept these comments as a response to the Draft Socio Economic Report.

I am a Floodplain grazier and live on [REDACTED] a property on the Culgoa river. Our business and indeed 1.2 million ha of the northern section of the Brewarrina shire including the communities of New Angledool, Goodooga and Weilmoringle, have suffered economic loss and severe decrease in frequency ,duration and extent by upstream development.

Robbie and Michelle,

Your team should be congratulated on your efforts to get across the Basin on a very complex issue that takes careful deconstruction to understand the depth of how government policy can affect local economies.

Key issue, is the complexity of the economy which is constantly evolving and responding to terms of trade, technology, markets, highly variable climate, government policy and implementation, as well as the sheer scale of the Basin and the highly variable expectations of the Basin communities.

I believe that you have identified and or touched on most of the issues that affect the Basin water perspective.

The report to me jumps around too much and needs to flow better. Suggest the broader Basin discovery of key issues, then drill down to the Northern and Southern Basin level as most of those issues ,findings and recommendations are quite specific and almost have to be tailor made to individual catchment and communities due to their location.

Key issue that needs to be kept at the forefront of policy makers and communities is that water availability is highly variable and there are no silver bullets.

Communities that are successful from irrigation appear to have higher reliability of flows and access. Once you get into communities where reliability is more variable ,the complexity increases within those economies. Those economies are often not just dependent on irrigation but usually on all the other stuff that happens.

In the NBAC process , the committee would go and hold 2 day meetings in key communities across the Northern Basin . I would work around the town early every morning and talk to as many people as I could about how they were going and issues really affected them and was water the key issue.

Almost all of the 75 conversations I had , had similar conclusions. All identified as townspeople who wanted water for community in terms of reliable town water supply ,scenic and recreational amenity first. Productive use was very important but most people acknowledged that all the other stuff ,govt services, dry land ag ,tourism etc was important too. Probably half or more spoke about commercial or social bullying with respect to voicing opinion about water in towns . Water quality was important too,

some bore water doesn't sustain parks and gardens whilst productive users got river water .

Key issues in the Northern Basin are,

High variability of flow , increased interception of flows in the gaining parts of the catchment ,both passive and active are growing and that's reducing the downstream interval between flows , the longitudinal connectivity and the duration, particularly considering that more than 50 % of total volume occurs in less than 20 % of years. This means that for 80 years out of 100 , flows are less than half than the long term average.

Key recommendations should include a need for a Hierarchy of use and clearer management processes to improve connectivity as this will improve overall community confidence and trust.

The CEWH has to divide their water assets and strategies into 2 sections ,Connectivity and key environmental assets.

Put more emphasis into researching reducing evaporation on storage dams , there is about 1000GL a year in that.

Care must be taken in the consideration of building more dams in the Basin as there are no high yielding and efficient sites left . There is going to have to be serious investigation of bring outside water into the Basin but this will have multiple high value uses such hydro and a key town piped water supply system.

Emphasis must be made to Govt that water is important to all ,not just to irrigators and they are not the only economic drivers within the Basin. As Ag is only about 20 % of the Basin economy we have to work on the transparency of water planning and use.

The complexity of the Basin economy requires certainty in allocation of water resources across the range of availability, not political science , dodgy modelling and even dodgier reporting.

The current Coronavirus shock is going to lead to a long and protracted economic and social contraction. It has already changed the way we live and refocused our community on the basics ,water, food , shelter ,communication and a means to pay for it.

This provides an opportunity for the Basin that if we can improve the implementation of the plan , improve the narrative and need for reform, and resource research for improved productivity, and improved engagement then we will succeed. Communication improvement and water security is key for community.

Whether we like it or not the water resources of the Basin are limited and over allocated , and reform has to happen but it does not have to be a disaster.

Regards

