

Comments on INDEPENDENT ASSESSMENT OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS
IN THE BASIN

Three paragraphs in the forward are key to the authors' views. One speaks of morale erosion, spreading sense of hopelessness and main street declines, while another view contrasts this with irrigated industries and associated businesses that are doing well. The optimism of relatively very few people in the latter category is causatively linked to unbundling and water reforms to imply these must be good.

The authors' clouded optimism extends to noting the continued support of many Basin communities for water reform. From reading this forward an Australian citizen from outside the MDB would conclude that unbundling, water reform and the interconnected system are achieving benefits for the nation. Importantly there is no attempt to analyse why the apparent irrigated successes of the past decade have happened and what fortuitous circumstances helped them. Furthermore the wisdoms inherent in now historic decisions in Victoria, that once conservatively determined the area of irrigable land in relation to water storage volumes and annually exercised extremely prudent water allocation policies, are disregarded. These were the key aspects which allowed our irrigation schemes to attract farming systems that were reliable, predictable and economically competitive.

Over 70 pages follow. The 'key messages' are presented under headings "Bring communities back to the heart of conversation", "Meet pressing needs of first nations", "Implement water reform with greater care", "Support communities to adapt and address critical gaps in wellbeing and services". Each of these five messages would gain approval from people within and outside the MDB. But further reading of this report, which cost well over \$1million, clearly suggests that the cosiness implied in the predominantly motherhood statements does little to address core issues. The focus of the report is mostly on treating effects rather than expertly analysing agricultural systems that best utilise the resources of the MDB through the ups and downs of our market based economy. It is these systems which generate prosperity if there is a reliable availability of inputs.

Some 20 "draft recommendations" follow which the authors claim will sustain, stimulate, support and promote communities in the Basin. Water market improvements are seen as critical in this together with a staging and drawing out of the targeted annual recovery of 2750 GI plus 450 GI until 2024. Doubts about ability to recover this water are not obvious and a sceptic must wonder if the suggested delayed timeline allows stealth to counteract any community concern about this physically absurd proposal.

Draft recommendation 2 allows the authors to show their true colours. It states "The Australian Government should time further water recovery to match the capacity to deliver water to where needed to achieve enhanced environmental social and working river outcomes. This approach means slowing further recovery in the Basin and accelerating efforts to relax delivery constraints."

This recommendation ensures that further demise of the Shepparton Irrigation Region and the Southern Riverina. It is perplexing that the panel have demonstrated such a lack of understanding of the importance of seasonal flows in rivers, damage to the structure of rivers and their ecosystems from sustained high flows, the cause of conveyance losses and the futility of using the extra water needed to irrigate in the arid zone. The enormous energy cost and greenhouse gas implication in pumping over 1500 Gl of water rather than delivering it by gravity flow in the now under-utilised GMID system also escaped economic analysis.

The report is critical of irrigation infrastructure investment but makes no attempt to show how halving water delivery in the GMID system has impacted on the economics of its operation. Interestingly considerable effort is made to recommend that there would be much greater benefit from public investment in schools, health and social services in irrigation communities. The economists have excelled in throwing money at the effect of the havoc created by poor water policy.

The report obliquely mentions sustainable and diverse production systems. Obviously these are the heart of the solution. The report does not give an economic analysis of where various animal and plant systems can make best use of scarce resources. Economists could write more reports, but how many more can the gurgler accept?

Perhaps the panel's behaviour in having only two of its number, who were locals, attend Shepparton meetings was a portent of what would emerge. It was a worry that panel members from outside our region did not attend meetings in the Shepparton Irrigation Region.

Among the 40 "draft findings", Shepparton is shown on page 30 to have outstandingly better population growth than 60 other Basin regions. We, who are part of the region's agriculture, see the inherent danger in correlating population dynamics with thriving irrigated industries. This part of the report succeeds in masking what has happened in this region's communities including school closures and enrolments and sporting clubs. Readers of the report could interpret Shepparton Region as being among the least impacted by MDB reforms.

I challenge other readers of this report to show how it shines an optimistic outlook for the Shepparton Irrigation District which includes the municipalities of Campaspe, Moira and Shepparton.



18th March 2020

Socio-Economic Assessment of Murray-Darling Basin Submission Template

[Submission Number 066 \(Online Comments\)](#)

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

██████████

2. Please enter your first name

██████

3. Please enter your email

████████████████████

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.

[Totally disagree with the Panel's recommendations. Please see submission](#)

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

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

[A extremely NEGATIVE impact on our community](#)

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.

[Timing of the recovery of more water for the environment is irrelevant, the issue is that the irrigation communities can not sustain more water leaving the area.](#)

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

[You may have listened to the people attending your drop in session, but you did not HEAR them.](#)

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

[It will spell the end of many regional towns](#)

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.
11. Are there any significant gaps? What are we missing?
12. If implemented, do you think our recommendations would make a difference or have a benefit to you and/or your community?

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
13. 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.
 Basin Regions & Towns would not require government support/intervention if irrigation communities were allowed to conduct their businesses with sufficient resources like water
14. Are there any significant gaps? What are we missing?
15. If implemented, do you think our recommendations would make a difference or have a benefit to you and/or your community?

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
16. 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.
17. Are there any significant gaps? What are we missing?
18. If implemented, do you think our recommendations would make a difference or have a benefit to you and/or your community?