

COMMUNIQUE: Basin Community Committee

Thursday 22 November 2018

The second meeting of the newly formed Basin Community Committee in Canberra last week was preceded by an insightful cultural awareness workshop facilitated by local Ngunnawal man, Richie Allan.

In the roundup of reports from both Committee members and the Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA), drought was the dominant theme both for dryland farmers and graziers and for irrigators in the Northern Basin.

Southern Basin irrigators are preparing for drying conditions and shortages of general security water, and increases in demand for temporary trade. The Committee noted positive outcomes from the implementation of the Basin Plan including progress against targets. Another positive outcome is increasing water use efficiency both on and off farm, where well-designed efficiency programs have been implemented.

Following presentations on seven key areas that the MDBA will focus on in the years ahead, Committee members deliberated how best to make their contribution in the next one to three years.

As representatives of communities across the Basin, they resolved to make the people of the Basin the central focus around which technical, scientific and administrative measures would be considered by the Committee.

Completing the water resource plans to adjust to the Basin Plan (through the sustainable diversion limit adjustment mechanism, constraints projects and the implementation of the Northern Basin Toolkit measures) were agreed as being immediately important.

Overlaying these are river operations and tactics being used to strengthen these operations, to ensure communities model good compliance with water extraction and use across the Basin. The Committee also highlighted the evaluation of the Basin Plan as a priority – ensuring it is accurate and meaningful to Basin communities, and importantly informs the future of the Basin.

The Committee acknowledged that there is an opportunity now for Aboriginal First Nations to have a greater involvement in water policy and management. This arises from the May 2018 package of commitments between Australian Government the Hon. David Littleproud MP, Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources and Labor and The Hon. Tony Burke MP Shadow Minister for Environment and Water. This is a priority area for the Basin Community Committee.

Members noted the continuing lack of knowledge and misunderstanding of aspects of the Basin Plan in many communities. ‘Who does what’ is an issue which creates considerable frustration at the local level. Members noted the need for Basin governments to collaborate and coordinate their communication

and engagement with Basin communities. The Committee discussed recent engagement activities that had occurred in their communities and urged Basin governments and the MDBA to work with communities to plan and tailor their approaches so that it works best for communities.

If you would like to raise an issue for the Basin Community Committee to investigate and provide advice to Basin governments, we encourage you to contact the Basin Community Committee via engagement@mdba.gov.au or on the community information line (1800 230 067).

The Committee is set up under the Water Act 2007. Current members were inducted in September and saw 12 new members join four returning members. For a full list of committee members and brief biographies, visit: www.mdba.gov.au/about-us/governance/basin-community-committee