

9 December 2019

Dear Murray–Darling Basin Ministerial Council

**Murray–Darling Basin Water Compliance Compact Assurance Report – Advice from the Independent Assurance Committee (IAC)**

As it did in 2018, the IAC provides its independent advice to the Murray–Darling Basin Ministerial Council on the 2019 Murray–Darling Basin Compliance Compact Assurance report. While considerable progress has been made to meet the commitments agreed in the Compact, there are still substantial outstanding issues in areas fundamental to the intent of the Compact and the larger water reforms.

Setting aside concern with delays in submitting Water Resource Plans for accreditation, there are two other major areas of concern.

The first concern is the slow and uneven progress with improvements to the metering and measurement of water extracted from the Murray–Darling Basin, including water harvested from the floodplain in the northern Basin. All Basin states have work to do to ensure that metering meets the standards now expected following the highly critical reviews into water compliance of 2017 and 2018. Public confidence in accounting for water use will not be restored until this is achieved. The ability to account for all Basin water use and flows through transparent water information systems based on quality assured hydrometrics is also vital.

The second concern is with the transparency and accountability of water governance in each jurisdiction. There is still a reluctance to share essential information about how water is managed. In some areas there have been dramatic improvements in public access to information. The New South Wales Natural Resource Access Regulator demonstrates this well. Improving transparency and accountability in water governance is an important step to restoring public confidence.

It is understandable how the severe drought conditions across the Basin can slow these important reforms and this can be factored into revised timetables. What is unacceptable is for these reforms to be shelved, causing further erosion of public confidence.

The Compact is set for review in 2020, and the IAC recognises that these devices have a natural life. This may have been reached for the Compact. What will be important is the determination of the next steps for the critical work not yet completed or not done to the standard required. The commitment of all parties to continue to improve water compliance arrangements matters most.

Yours Sincerely



Allan Holmes

Chair of the IAC

*The Independent Assurance Committee was established under the Water Act 2007 (Cth) in 2018 to provide expert advice on the design, implementation and adequacy of the MDBA's Basin Plan compliance program. This action was taken by the Authority following the tabling of the Murray–Darling Basin Water Compliance Review in late 2017. In the Compact that resulted from the review, the IAC was given a formal role to provide an assurance report on the MDBA's progress under the Compact. In 2018, as part of that role, the IAC also provided advice to the Murray–Darling Basin Ministerial Council on the whole Compact Assurance Report.*