



To Whom It May Concern,

RE: Submission to Productivity Commission Five Year Review of the Murray Darling Basin Plan

Edward River Council thanks the Productivity Commission for the opportunity to make a submission to the five-year review of the Murray Darling Basin Plan.

Edward River Council is located in the Southern Basin and represents a community of approximately 9,000 permanent residents across a region covering 8,881 square kilometres, including the town of Deniliquin and the six rural villages of Blighty, Boorooban, Conargo, Mayrung, Pretty Pine and Wanganella. Agriculture and irrigated agriculture are our region's largest economic contributors and the flow-on effect from the agricultural sector to the retail and urban environment is significant.

Edward River Council is supportive of a Basin Plan but is of the view that the implementation of the current plan is not balanced. The intent of the plan is and should be on achieving 'triple bottom line' outcomes that treat social, economic and environmental outcomes equally. Under the current plan, the reality that is seen every day within our community is that the environmental outcomes being sought are stripping away from the social and economic outcomes. To date, any structural support or reform to mitigate these effects has been limited and failed to balance the negative impacts of having water removed.

In February 2018 the Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) released the Southern Basin Community profiles. Within the Edward River Council Local Government Area, a community profile was completed for Deniliquin. This report found that between 2001 and 2016 the following has taken place:

- Population decreased by 12.2%
- Total workforce decreased by 26.4% (747 FTE)
- Agricultural workforce decreased by 73.1% (791 FTE)
- Agricultural manufacturing workforce increased by 74.7% (70 FTE)

- Non-agricultural private workforce decreased by 16.7% (624 FTE)
- Government services workforces increased by 18.5% (94 FTE)

(Deniliquin Township Community Profile, 2018,

https://www.mdba.gov.au/sites/default/files/pubs/community-profile-deniliquin_0.pdf)

Similar numbers to the Deniliquin Township community profile are seen right across the Southern Basin and Murray-Riverina region. Council acknowledges that across the period of 2001 to 2016 there have been many significant changes to the economic structure of rural and regional communities. In particular, the significant changes being seen in the agricultural sector and the restructuring of this workforce make a contribution to the reduction in population and workforce.

Council's position, however, isn't that we should scrap the Murray Darling Basin Plan and think that we could return to pre-2011 or 2001 population and workforce figures. Our position is that we can't afford to lose any further water. The impacts to date have been significant and are being felt not just within the agricultural sector but across all sectors.

Previous discussions with the Senior Economist at the MDBA have highlighted that the full impacts of water being removed are not felt over the first one to three years, but are fully felt by the eighth year. Within our region, the majority of water removed occurred between 2012 and 2014. So, for our community we don't think the full impacts of the water already removed will be felt until 2020-2022. This is a scary proposition for both Council and the community, both qualitatively and quantitatively the pain and impact on our community can already be seen. Quantitatively this is highlighted by the numbers within the Deniliquin Township profile, 26.4% decrease in total workforce, while qualitatively this is seen through empty shops and heard about through discussions with farmers and families who are struggling to survive. To think that this could further increase over the next five years, as well as the possibility of having additional water removed is something that we don't think our community and region can survive.

Edward River Council would like to submit the following points:

- There should be no further productive water acquisition through buy-backs, the impacts on our communities are far too great
- Greater detail on the benefits, uses, and regulation of environmental water is required

- All regions across the Murray Darling Basin should have the same standard of compliance, metering, and measurement as the systems currently implemented in the Murray system
- The impacts not just on the agricultural sector, but the flow-on impacts to all other sectors have been significant and the current approach to assessing and understanding these impacts has been poor. This must be improved so we can achieve the triple bottom line outcomes originally envisaged.
- Water is the key economic driver of our region and we have already made a significant contribution to water recovery, we believe no further water should be removed

To date, a significant amount of water has been removed from our region. The additional water proposed to be removed (605 GL Sustainable Diversion and 450 GL up water) is not acceptable to the Edward River Council and our community.

Council thanks the Productivity Commission for the opportunity to make a submission. If you have any further questions or would like the additional information we would be happy to respond.

Yours Sincerely,

Cr Norm Brennan

Mayor

Edward River Council