



**Submission to the Productivity Commission
Murray-Darling Basin Plan: Five-year Assessment
18 April 2018**

Thank you for the opportunity for Leeton Shire Council to provide this submission to the Inquiry into the Murray-Darling Basin Plan: Five Year- assessment, being conducted by the Australian Government Productivity Commission. We commend the Australian Government in seeking the views of water users and stakeholders in the key areas of the Plan's progress through this submission process and public consultation sessions.

Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment Mechanism

Supply Measures

Leeton Shire Council supports the use of supply measure projects which has determined a proposed sustainable diversion limit (SDL) adjustment increase of 605GL. We understand that if the proposed adjustment to the SDL is agreed, that there will be no further water recovery in the southern connected Basin to reach the current Basin Plan target, subject to existing water recovery contracts being fulfilled and the implementation of the Adjustment Mechanism efficiency component.

More productive water available for consumptive use whilst still achieving equivalent environmental outcomes will be of immense benefit to our communities and industries who rely on water availability for production and their livelihoods. Further, any increased employment and investment opportunities across the Southern Basin made possible through the delivery of projects will be a significant bonus in strengthening our economy.

Leeton Shire Council advises that details on some of the proposed supply projects in our region are not yet available (e.g. the Murrumbidgee Constraints Management Strategy). More detailed project information and consultation needs to be provided to our Council and to our communities. Extensive community, landholder, and industry and expert input is vital. This will assist governments to further understand the benefits and potential implications of the projects and ensure that any third party impacts are identified and appropriately mitigated before the projects are fully implemented.

Further, we recommend that a range of consultation, communication and engagement methods be considered (where feasible) to cater for various community needs. For example, this could include the use of social media but also the use of more traditional methods, e.g. face to face information sessions and newspaper advertisements that reach the wider community. Key to project success will be honest, transparent, timely and focused communication that is ongoing.

If the consultation and review process identifies stakeholders or groups who may oppose or be impacted by the projects, we urge basin governments to consult and collaborate with them to find possible alternative solutions where possible. If alternative solutions are not possible, compensation measures must be agreed to appropriately mitigate any adverse impacts. It is important to ensure that our communities and the economy are not being inadvertently jeopardised through the projects.

Rigorous monitoring and evaluation of projects is required throughout every project stage to ensure the integrity of the projects is maintained and that balanced social, economic and environmental outcomes can be achieved. Projects will need to be refined over time and include an adaptive component as new information, science, and innovations come to light.

Efficiency Measures

There is some concern amongst communities on whether efficiency measures to recover the extra 450 GL can be implemented in a way that meets the Basin Plan requirement for 'neutral or improved socioeconomic outcomes.' It is critical that any efficiency measures generate positive or neutral outcomes (that is have **no** adverse impacts on communities).

Environmental Water

Leeton Shire Council recognises that environmental water is essential to the health, wellbeing and sustainability of the Murray-Darling Basin system and the communities within it. We recognise the importance of the role of the CEWO and our state based natural resource management agencies in administering legislation and managing the use of environmental water.

In developing measures to manage environmental water, Basin governments must consider social, economic and environmental impacts so that a balanced outcome is achieved in Basin Plan implementation.

There is some concern that current provisions governing the management, use and accountability of environmental water are not effectively measured. Absence of rigorous monitoring and evaluation of the efficiency of environmental water use compromises the efficiency of the outcomes.

Inclusion of local governments in planning for environmental watering (through the Murray-Darling Association) along with collaboration between local land services, catchment management authorities and CEWO local engagement officers can increase public confidence in environmental watering.

Leeton Shire also recommends greater investment in and reliance on local knowledge to develop solutions to any unintended and adverse consequences from environmental watering measures. There is strong knowledge on efficient water saving practices within our own communities. This knowledge could be better used to inform key environmental activities and projects.

We also encourage activities that improve community engagement and awareness of the way in which environmental water is used and managed.

Compliance

Leeton Shire Council understands from reviews undertaken by the MDBA and Independent Panels that compliance systems and activities in some jurisdictions are more effective than in others and therefore we welcome the introduction of compliance reviews such as the recent NSW Government Water Reform Action Plan. We support an equitable and transparent approach to the management of water that will increase community confidence in water management.

Basin Institutional and Governance Arrangements

There is some confusion amongst communities in regards to institutional and governance arrangements for water management. We recommend that more detail and accessible information be provided to the public on the various roles and responsibilities for water management in the Basin.

Leeton Shire Council is also keen to understand whether the recommendations produced by the different inquiries and reports on the Basin Plan are being taken into consideration holistically. For example, will there be a consolidation between the findings in the Ken Matthews Report with the current inquiry being undertaken by the Productivity Commission?

In closing Leeton Shire Council encourages strong political fortitude and for our Basin governments to continue working together - ultimately this will be vital in strengthening water management efforts for the benefit of the entire Murray-Darling Basin and the nation.

Leeton Shire Council Contact

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