

15 August 2019

Ms Robbie Sefton
Chair
Independent Panel for the Assessment of Social and Economic Conditions in the
Murray Darling Basin
Via email: independentpanel@mdba.gov.au

Dear Ms Sefton

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the draft Terms of Reference and Assessment Framework for the Independent Panel for the Assessment of Social and Economic Conditions in the Murray Darling Basin. The Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) is the national voice of local government in Australia, representing 537 councils across the country. In structure, ALGA is a federation of state and territory local government associations. ALGA's submission does not replace the individual views of the associations and individual councils, some of which may have made separate submissions during the consultation process. As such, the information contained below should be considered as supplementary information.

We note that in engaging with Basin communities the Panel's priority "*will be given to those whose livelihoods and lives are strongly connected to and impacted by water. This includes irrigators, recreational and commercial river users, nations group and nation communities of the Murray Darling Basin, businesses who operate in local economies deeply connected to the rivers and groups of people who have clear local, cultural and other connections to the Basin's rivers and water management*". The priority does not explicitly include communities dependent on the rivers for town water supply. Given the current issues with water security for a number of small and large towns in the Basin the needs of towns should be considered in the assessment.

Draft Terms of Reference

We note and are supportive of the draft Terms of Reference. In relation to D- *the review should take into account the ongoing structural changes in agriculture and communities in the Murray Darling Basin, and seek to separate the effects of these trends, and events such as drought, from the effects of the water reforms including the Basin Plan* – we ask that you consider not only the ongoing structural changes but also the cumulative impact of changes. One small change in a valley may have negligible impacts whereas multiple small changes in the valley may have a significant widescale impact. Similarly, we would also ask that you consider the impacts on "keystone" sectors (a sector that plays a unique and crucial role in the way a local economy functions) of changes in water policy.

Seven key questions

Overall the questions are comprehensive. However, we would suggest that the following be considered –

- The Panel should be prepared to hear of people's concerns for themselves and their communities as well as their vision and hopes.
- Question 4 – *How have water reforms and changes impacted different Basin Communities to date, and what future impacts and opportunities are likely?* The word changes is very broad. Does this mean climate change, change to the amount of water available for irrigation etc. You may need to be more explicit if you are seeking information on a specific aspect of the water reforms.
- You may wish to consider a question related to balancing the allocation of water for irrigation, the environment and town water supplies. This is an emerging issue that is likely to increase in importance with the Governments current policy agenda to facilitate population growth in regional Australia.

Thank you for acknowledging that some of these questions will be uncomfortable for some communities and stakeholders. We recognise that the management of the Basin is highly complex but are mindful of the need to ensure that the principle of equity for all regions across the Basin is considered. This doesn't appear to be listed in the criteria, but it is an important governance principle underlying the Basin plan and should be reflected in the Terms of Reference.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on the draft Terms of Reference and Assessment Framework. If you would like to discuss any aspect of our submission, please do not hesitate to contact ALGA's Executive Director Policy and Research, Ms Roz Chivers, on roslyn.chivers@alga.asn.au or 02 6122 9400.

Yours sincerely



Adrian Beresford Wylie
Chief Executive