



I N L A N D
R I V E R S
N E T W O R K

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Social and Economic Assessment Panel
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Wednesday 14 August 2019

Dear Panel Chair,

The Inland Rivers Network (“IRN”) is a coalition of environment groups and individuals that has been advocating for healthy rivers, wetlands and groundwater in the Murray-Darling Basin since 1991.

Many members of our network live in the Basin and have been strongly supportive of the water reform process over time because of the importance of healthy river systems to community well-being.

We welcome the opportunity to comment on the draft Terms of Reference and Assessment Framework for the Independent Social and Economic Assessment of the Murray-Darling Basin.

The Panel must assess the benefits and opportunities of water reform, as well as the impacts, across all sectors, including non-irrigated agriculture.

Term B should be worded in a similar way to Term C to consider: ‘*the impacts and opportunities of water reforms*’. It is important for this assessment to consider the benefits derived from water reform over the continuation of ‘business as usual’ with over-allocation and degraded river systems.

IRN proposes an additional Term F to assess the social and economic value of ecosystem services provided by healthy river systems and enhancing community resilience.

The assessment of water reforms must consider impacts and opportunities around water trading separately from processes involving the return of water to the environment.

The Panel should take advantage of the existing socio-economic evidence gathered by academics, Government agencies and other sources to form a basis for moving forward on this project. A gaps analysis would assist in finding a way forward.

There is a high level of consultation fatigue within Basin communities and a need to be aware of other processes.

For example, in NSW during August there are six Water Resource Plans out for comment and the Natural Resources Commission draft report on the Barwon-Darling water sharing plan. During September there will be consultation on the review of Floodplain Harvesting plus other aspects of the NSW Water Reform Action Plan.

The Panel will need to communicate with all water agencies to avoid consultation clashes and to consider opportunities to combine community engagement activities.

This important independent socio-economic assessment must not reinvent the wheel but build on previous work, identify the gaps in that work, be inclusive of all agricultural and community sectors and consider the benefits of a healthy river system in the Basin.

For more information please contact us at inlanddriversnetwork@gmail.com or 0428 817 282

Yours sincerely



Bev Smiles
President