



INDEPENDENT ASSESSMENT OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS IN THE BASIN

Independent Assessment of Social and Economic Conditions in the Murray-Darling Basin

Key messages from stakeholder consultations in south-western Murray–Darling
Basin – 7 October to 11 October 2019

**On behalf The Hon. David Littleproud MP,
Australian Government
Minister for Water Resources, Drought, Rural Finance,
Natural Disaster and Emergency Management**

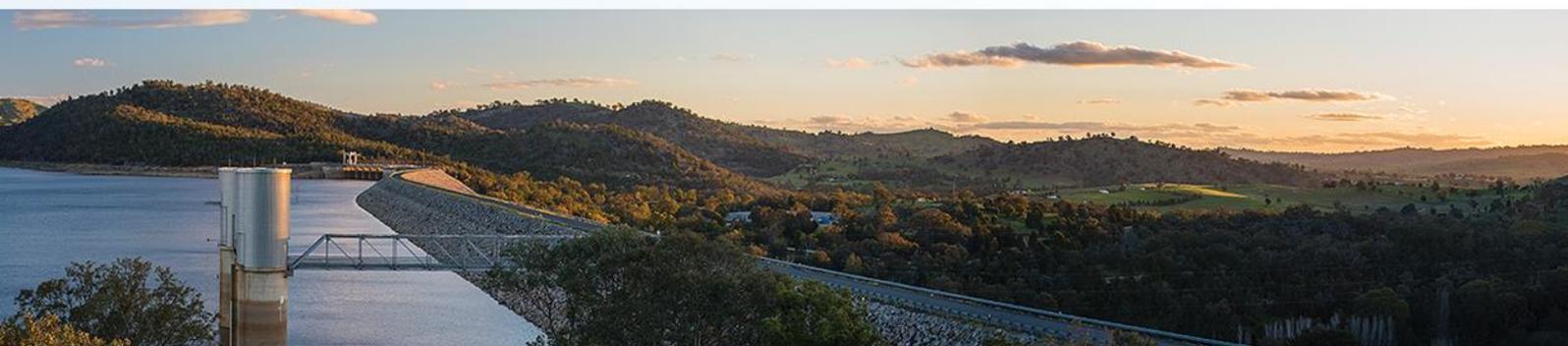




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Overview and key themes

Panel Members Rene Woods, Bruce Simpson and Andrew Kassebaum undertook consultation in the south-west of the Murray–Darling Basin between 7 October and 11 October, meeting with a range of stakeholders from across the region. This document contains detailed summaries from each of the engagement sessions. The summaries do not necessarily reflect views of the Panel and are not a direct transcript. They have been edited to ensure the privacy of participants. This stakeholder engagement will inform the development of the Panel’s Interim and Final Reports.

Engagement sessions were held in:

- Mildura
- Menindee
- Wentworth
- Barmera
- Loxton
- Murray Bridge
- Strathalbyn.

Engagement sessions included a mixture of public open sessions, and targeted roundtables to ensure the engagement captured both a broad cross-section of communities (including stakeholders from health, education, First Nations, agriculture, agriculture supply chain, local government and business chambers and more) through targeted sessions, as well as providing open public forums. This was a deliberate choice to avoid the risk that some voices or perspectives may not have been heard.

The Panel members would like to thank everyone who attended for their time and input. The Panel will be delivering its Interim Report to government by December 2019.



Key Messages from Mildura Drop-In Session

9 am – 11 am, 7th October 2019, Alfred Deakin Centre

Overview

This document summarises key messages from engagement, focusing on:

1. Current social and economic conditions in the community
2. Potential actions, opportunities and solutions.

These two topics reflect the structure of the engagement sessions, and consultation questions asked. This document reflects what the Panel heard during consultation but does not necessarily reflect the views of the Panel.

Detailed information regarding specific individuals has been withheld for privacy, and key points have been summarised and grouped where repeated. This is not a transcript of the meeting.

1. Current social and economic conditions

[When asked: *How would you describe the current health and prosperity of your community?*]

- Anyone who doesn't have water access has been doing it tough for about four years. Didn't think we'd have a bad year this year but current years are bad and next year is going to be much worse with over development.
- With 50 per cent allocation next year, we won't be able to grow crops.
- Mental health issues – suicide rates are extremely high. People are choosing suicide over livelihoods.
- Young children are moving to the cities – the loss of young people from Mildura and Sunraysia.
- There has been a break in community harmony.
- Soldier settlement sized blocks have no future in Sunraysia. Amalgamation setups.
- Issues existed before the Basin Plan – 'Swiss cheese effect'.
- A lot of anger in the community with no way of dealing with it.
- The community does not feel like there is any coherent plan/strategy.

[When asked: *What makes your region or community different – what are the major strengths and opportunities, or challenges?*]

- Money is being made, but the community is declining – people out of town are doing okay.



- Strengths:
 - Good water access – everything revolves around the Murray Critical.
 - Mass of population and services.
 - Presence of LMW (employer).
 - Flying padre – a team of specialists, nurses, mental health.
 - Big horticultural industry – a lot of employment.
- Challenges:
 - Volunteer organisations and clubs (Rotary and Lions clubs) attendance is trending down. They are no longer thriving.
 - Social impacts – when things are down (economically) people are reverting to gambling, drugs and alcohol.
 - Sporting organisations – cricket, footy, hockey – numbers are down. People moving off the land, moving for education etc.
 - Lifeline under-resourced. You cannot actually get onto the lifeline.
 - No one knows what people are doing in this town.
 - The costs of environmental water.
 - Climate is changing.
 - Concerned about SA being dependant on VIC and NSW.
 - NFF (National Farmers' Federation) is exacerbating community concerns and what the people are about – they are causing the noise.

[When asked: *How do you believe water management and reform has changed your community? If so, can you describe how?*]

- Reform provided some flexibility but also created other issues. For example, carryover is too high.
- Should have been tagged water – policy at the state level should have been regulated.
- Need to look at what happens when you move water into other regions. This wasn't properly looked at. Everyone knew the choke was an issue but allowed the development. Need a system where extra licences are required to bring water through the choke at certain times. [Ignored by state and local government regulation].

2. Potential actions, opportunities and solutions

[When asked: *What do you see as the main inhibitors or facilitators of positive change and why?*]

- The changing weather is something that must be accounted for.
- We really need to consider what a lower inflow/allocation future looks like and prepare for that.



[When asked: *What roles can governments, industry, non-profit groups, First Nations, communities and individuals play in supporting prosperous and sustainable Basin communities?*]

- Some scepticism about what the government can actually do.
- Need the state and federal governments to work together.
- Need more storage of water.
- Better capture of water – need to stop pumping water into the sea and use it for environmental or consumptive use.
- The Basin should have one authority, but the Constitution doesn't allow this. There are too many levels of government and authorities which makes it difficult to get things done.
- Remove 'off allocation water' from Murrumbidgee. Floodplain harvesting rules – connectivity water (Barwon-Darling).



Key Messages from Mildura Roundtable Session

11:30 am – 1:30 pm, 7th October 2019, Alfred Deakin Centre

Overview

This document summarises key messages from engagement, focusing on:

1. Current social and economic conditions in the community
2. Potential actions, opportunities and solutions

These two topics reflect the structure of the engagement sessions, and consultation questions asked. This document reflects what the Panel heard during the consultation but does not necessarily reflect the views of the Panel.

Detailed information regarding specific individuals has been withheld for privacy, and key points have been summarised and grouped where repeated. This is not a transcript of the meeting.

1. Current social and economic conditions

[When asked: *How would you describe the current health and prosperity of your community?*]

- Community under severe stress due to drought. The first time we've had dust storms since 1960s. We do, however, have a strong vibrant community and trades are still thriving (you can't access a builder at the moment).
- The distinction between hobby farm vs small solidier settlements
- Lots of booming tourism:
 - Use of weir pools and positive environmental outcomes being achieved.
 - Tour operator – great opportunity to see people come out, spend four days and stay in the region.
 - Date farms, cherry farms – opportunity to grow.
 - See opportunities to network and contribute.
- There is a disconnect between the Federal Government and community conditions.
- Loss of employment due to irrigation decline.
- Mental health concerns – even children are suffering emotionally, and there are social disadvantages that are not being talked about. We need more mental health support and counselling – more people are coming in, but we have had cuts to NDIS and loss of resources.
- The health of the community is poor:
 - So many empty shops – people going bankrupt.
 - Alcohol and drug abuse in the town growing.
 - Family violence also growing.



- Our economy has two drivers Economic – farming and government money.
- Failures at state and federal levels. Trade rules favour corporates and disadvantage the small growers. Not able to ABA in deficit. Markets will be investigated by ACCC however we have no faith in the ACCC. We do not think it is correct that some people are trading in water.
- Our economic community relies on water; without water, a polarised community is created. We have extreme wealth but also very low SES. Sixty-five per cent on La Trobe University campus are low SES.
- Poor economic environment – labour-hire issues, huge amounts of money being spent on land purchases.
- Small business owners also being affected despite not being driven by water – they don't understand the impact of farming and irrigation on their businesses.
- Corporate plantings provide a lot of employment but also provide greater pressure on smaller private irrigators on the river. Changing landscapes. Need good business planning.

[When asked: *What makes your region or community different – what are the major strengths and opportunities, or challenges?*]

- Challenges:
 - The polarisation of wealth.
 - Census data out of date.
 - Rate of change significant – puts pressure on our capacity to change. How long does a community need to be resilient for? How long do you send resources for?
 - No vision or execution of planning. Not everyone has the capacity and the scenario.
 - Lack of permanency in the rules which impacts farmer's decision making and planning for their business. Don't always want help, resources, or rule changes – just want consistency and permanency.
 - Mildura/ Sunraysia is on the front seat of climate change – very close to Goyder line. Reduced likelihood of runoff from the catchment.
 - Need to consider how both levels of government will deal with climate change. Substantial industry that could work with \$600 ML water budget. The last dam was built to drought-proof Victoria. The government needs to look at harvesting water – quarantine water to dry periods. The bucket is not filling as much as it used to.
 - Restructure going on in service sectors. Puts a strain on existing organisations. Availability – estimating additional 4,000 people need to come into the aged care sector to cope with the increase demand from aging population.
 - Rule changes – ones that make the process more complicated are also the problem.



- Lack of social workers in the area.
- Opportunities/strengths:
 - Presence of the airport. Makes a huge difference – allows for FIFO health professionals. Strong community health organisations.
 - Universities are a huge benefit. Hard to get professionals to come live in Mildura. Eighty-five per cent of students stay in this community. If they weren't here would be different.
 - There are other industries coming through. Mildura is experiencing an 8 per cent increase in population per year. Focus on regionalisation from governments.
 - Renewables, particularly solar.
 - Tourism is a big opportunity. How to get people to Mildura?
 - Irrigation based tourism – want to see the produce, taste local wines and produce. Where is all the fresh produce? The success of tourism is related to success of irrigation — paddock to plate.
 - Opportunities for FN people – they are often just getting started. Have a strong number of indigenous communities – opportunities around water and natural landscapes. Indigenous values, landscapes. Build on environmental values that complement the community.

[When asked: *Looking back, what have been the major trends and drivers impacting your community, and how do you view these looking forward?*]

- Growth of urban town water use.
- Impact of hot periods – deliverability issues. Very slow to move.
- Changes in government funding. The competitive market in the social sector is deplorable. Loss of a financial counsellor divided between different areas. Resourcing these services becomes very difficult
- Solar/renewables – boom and bust. If they do not invest in the infrastructure, the investment will leave.
- Unemployment is at lows. If the investment is not made available, then the impact upon employment will be felt as the opportunity is lost.

2. Potential actions, opportunities and solutions

[When asked: *What do you see as the main inhibitors or facilitators of positive change and why?*]

- Tyranny of distance.
- Commodity prices – have a big influence on the success of farming. Impact profitability of farming.
- Mental wellbeing.



- The unattractiveness of the district for professionals. The perception that there is not enough diversity or people coming in. Need to ensure their partners/spouses also feel connected to the community.
 - Mallee Community Partnership – recruited nine people. Have to make sure partners/spouses have jobs, extra-curricular opportunities, and community support. 2/3 years if they stay in Mildura is a good investment.
- Do not like competition in the health sectors. Better to grow your own.
- Education/career aspirations. There is a disconnect between aspiration levels in the community – only 19 per cent obtain high education.
 - Aspiration building is deep within the community. Reflects on the community – want to be able to be a doctor but need to be able to see it to do it.
- Need more exposure to opportunities. People don't see the opportunity, so they do not think to go for it.
- Siloed approach to projects is an inhibitor, e.g. health project had nine agencies but should have worked together to get gap analysis. Doesn't seem to be a coordinated approach.

[When asked: *What does 'success' for your community look like?*]

- Diversity in the economy – need industry diversity. And need integration of the diversity – needs to be less siloed and work in a complementary way.
- Climate change preparedness, including knowledge of extremes of climate.
- Business resilience.
- Opportunities for change. Millewa Landcare – successful because of diversity, not solely reliant on one industry.
- From an irrigation point of view, need stability in the rules and regulations. Big cost to make changes when you have permanent plantings. In a family farm, it takes a lot of time, and there is huge change.
- The need to feel more comfortable with change is required. If want to be successful in future, then need to be prepared to change in light of climate change.

[When asked: *What roles can governments, industry, non-profit groups, First Nations, communities and individuals play in supporting prosperous and sustainable Basin communities?*]

- Simpler processes and easier access. Need a clear strategy.
- Our industry needs greater diversity.
- Need social support from NFP.
- Drought brings out the need for communities to address the collective – opportunity to reflect.
- Sustainability of economic development.
- A well-balanced reliance on water. Currently, table is not balanced.



Key Messages from Menindee Roundtable Session 1

9 am – 11 am, 8th October 2019, Maidens Hotel

Overview

This document summarises key messages from engagement, focusing on:

1. Current social and economic conditions in the community
2. Potential actions, opportunities and solutions

These two topics reflect the structure of the engagement sessions, and consultation questions asked. This document reflects what the Panel heard during the consultation but does not necessarily reflect the views of the Panel.

Detailed information regarding specific individuals has been withheld for privacy, and key points have been summarised and grouped where repeated. This is not a transcript of the meeting.

1. Current social and economic conditions

[When asked: *How would you describe the current health and prosperity of your community?*]

- Management of the Darling River through WSPs has split it up into too many different parts. The Barkandji people see the Darling River as connected all along, but current management does not allow for this.
- Everyone is being affected, and many people are leaving.
- Employment in the region has decreased significantly. This is worsened by people leaving, e.g. when Tandou (cotton grower) left, employment opportunities left too. There is a lack of employment opportunities for young people.
- Data of the area is not up to date.
- No promise that we'll ever have water. We don't have entitlement to country water. There is nothing.
- Health is a major concern – especially mental health. There are a lot of suicides, more than ever before, in both FN and non-indigenous communities. People are emotional and concerned about the lack of water. People (especially younger generations) are resorting to drugs, alcohol, and crime.
- The quality/health of the water is also of concern. Feel a need to stand together because we all drink water.
- Suffering significant economic impacts and some of this is related to media and perceptions from the media. For example, tourism has suffered greatly:
 - River Lady (boat operator) don't get any tours anymore.
 - People don't hear that there is water in the river so they don't come out to Menindee for tourism.



- Limited opportunities for FN people to participate economically.
- Things keep getting taken away from us.
- Menindee Lakes are supposed to be a Ramsar listed site (protecting wetlands), but NSW didn't support the listing at the time (2010).
- Our wildlife is suffering – swans, pelicans and other birds need water as well — water needed for the anabranches of the river.
- No consideration for the archaeological and cultural value that exists in Menindee lakes (especially for Aboriginal people).
- Feel like the Murray is a big river, but the water is not being shared.
- Knowledge of groundwater sources existing from Dreamtime stories but we need to fix surface water management first and leave groundwater alone until then.
- The community is suffering socially – loss of meeting spaces and shared family times. Younger generations are having to leave the land to provide for their families. Where we used to have five generations go out and spend time together (e.g. fishing), now not even one generation is out there fishing.
- No security of water. Feel like the government has sold us out.

[When asked: *What makes your region or community different – what are the major strengths and opportunities, or challenges?*]

- We have a lot of water connectivity and lake systems in the area, which is a strength. But connectivity is across the anabranches which require water.
- The cultural heritage along the Baaka (Darling River) must be considered. There are Aboriginal heritage sites and a huge number of burials along the river which are of high importance to the Barkandji people.
- Mismanagement of the fish ladder – needs to be fixed.

[When asked: *How do you believe water management and reform has changed your community? If so, can you describe how?*]

- There used to be a lot of citrus in Bourke, now gone.
- Mechanisation of industries (e.g. cotton).
- Significant loss of jobs – used to have so many employment opportunities that police would come to kick people out.
- Many issues created from the lack of connectivity through the Darling.

2. Potential actions, opportunities and solutions

[When asked: *What does 'success' for your community look like?*]

- Water is life; without water there is nothing. There was life in the communities when there was water in the river.



- No floodplain harvesting.
- Should be careful about reconfiguring the lakes for storage. The other lakes that are less disturbed should not be further disturbed due to their cultural heritage.
- The Barkandji people want cultural water to be separated from environmental water. Believe that animals are entitled to water, the people who live here need water, and the environment needs water, but these should be separate. There needs to be cultural flow coming down the river.
- Need to prioritise community over the hierarchy of water allocation for irrigation. The Barkandji people question why they should have to pay for water when they did not sell it.

[When asked: What roles can governments, industry, non-profit groups, First Nations, communities and individuals play in supporting prosperous and sustainable Basin communities?]

- Don't want any mucking about with Morton Boolka Regulator (regulator between Lake Mendindee and Lake Cawndilla). Burials are being disturbed by the current size of the regulator here. A bigger one would create much larger flows and damage to cultural heritage.
- Water management in NSW needs to be investigated. Perhaps a Royal Commission.



Key Messages from Menindee Roundtable Session 2

11:30 am – 1:30 pm, 8th October 2019, Maidens Hotel

Overview

This document summarises key messages from engagement, focusing on:

1. Current social and economic conditions in the community
2. Potential actions, opportunities and solutions

These two topics reflect the structure of the engagement sessions, and consultation questions asked. This document reflects what the Panel heard during consultation but does not necessarily reflect the views of the Panel.

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1. Current social and economic conditions

[When asked: *How would you describe the current health and prosperity of your community?*]

- Community is declining. The last 10-15 years has been the worst in memory for many. Conditions have been worse than during the Millennium Drought.
- Economic and water decisions have resulted in a large decline in job opportunities and economic downturn, e.g. move of Tandou.
- Used to have a work ethic because young people were employed, but there is no work ethic developing. Seeing a decline in the community and welfare.
- Economic opportunities used to be more diverse with the water board (e.g. used to have large table grape industry) but with that gone, the only real employment these days is in the hospital and local government.
- School enrolment is also in decline. Used to have 135-150 student body, now less than 80.
- Social activities effected, e.g. sporting teams gone. Not enough people to field a team now.
- Tourism (around Lake Tandou) used to be a big employer and attract lots of people in.
- Taxes are going out of town, but no benefits are coming in.
- Lack of investment confidence – no one knows what is going to happen, and as a result, no one wants to invest.
- A lot of frustration from the lack of resources. We have run out of water 12 months early.



- Feel like there is over-consultation, and it is done poorly. We have had 11 meetings in the last 12 weeks, but for example, floodplain harvesting, there was no consultation. Attendees are essentially volunteering their time – it is expensive – social element of trying to participate.
- Many businesses are closing down – not just those connected to the irrigation industry, but also town businesses, e.g. cafes, supermarkets.
- Mental health is a concern – people are miserable/depressed, and there has been an increase in the use of drugs.
- FN peoples don't have opportunities to fish. The towns are unsettled.

[When asked: *What makes your region or community different – what are the major strengths and opportunities, or challenges?*]

- Challenges:
 - Transport problems – lost services linking farms to markets. Makes it difficult to get produce to the market.
 - Local hospitals – used to have 950 presentations per month, now less than 500 per month.
 - Decreased population. Isolation creates feelings of insignificance.
- Strengths:
 - Spirit of the people – strength of spirit, personalities, and effort people put in the community.
 - There are growing opportunities – can grow good and early fruit here.

[When asked: *Looking back, what have been the major trends and drivers impacting your community, and how do you view these looking forward?*]

- Water security concerns.
- No management of the whole system. NSW Government doesn't want to acknowledge the need for connectivity. Interconnected issues with the WSP in Murray, i.e. Barmah Choke – issues placed upon the river as a result of losing flows through the Barwon-Darling.
- Biggest driver was unbundling of land and water. Has had a massive impact.
- True economic value of water – it goes up and down.
- Nothing been done for efficiency project at Menindee (150 million funding). Do not believe the SDL project has any impact on Menindee Lakes.

[When asked: *How do you believe water management and reform has changed your community? If so, can you describe how?*]

- Reform has negative connotations. The resource has always been over-allocated – how can you claw it back when it was already there?



- Capitalism – globalism impacts. You can't make a resource-dependent on a commodity price.

2. Potential actions, opportunities and solutions

[When asked: *What do you see as the main inhibitors or facilitators of positive change and why?*]

- Lack of communication and cohesiveness between the three tiers of government.
 - There is a lack of continuity at every level of government.
 - It is hard to keep putting in the effort to build government's understanding to get things done.
 - The ability of governments to manage their work has diminished considerably.
- Project announcements, but a lack of on-ground action.
- No responsibility or accountability from the government. For example, WaterNSW billing error (bills sent out with wrong valley-based tariff structure). Government response – 'it's not our fault'.
- No cohesive federal approach to water management.

[When asked: *What does 'success' for your community look like?*]

- People and businesses are thriving (more people and businesses have turned over).
- The landscape is green.
- Thriving youth and employment, and social opportunities like sports teams.
- Ivanhoe prison closing announced - \$20 million going out.
- Better mental and physical health.
- Guaranteed water.

[When asked: *What roles can governments, industry, non-profit groups, First Nations, communities and individuals play in supporting prosperous and sustainable Basin communities?*]

- NSW needs to support their towns. The state of NSW bush communities and water security is very poor, compared to other states.
- Need more consistent metering across the MDB.
- Lack of work and leadership has been created by mismanagement of water. It plays into everything.
- Volunteer organisations need support. Cannot get people to volunteer on the SES and everyone is getting old.
- Need permanent/consistent regulation of water.
- Don't want money, just want water.



Key Messages from Wentworth Drop-In Session

9 am – 11 am, 9th October 2019, Wentworth Town Hall

Overview

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2. Potential actions, opportunities and solutions

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1. Current social and economic conditions

[When asked: *How would you describe the current health and prosperity of your community?*]

- Frustration at repetitive questions/panels – some lawyers from “Justice for People and the Environment” came from Queensland earlier in the year and asked about the health of our community. There have been a number of reports into the management of water in NSW. Many investigations/reports exist – question the purpose of continued reports.
- Environmental flows have not been properly managed. In 2016, when there was lots of water around, there was a blue-green algae bloom. For six weeks, while there was high water, people were cut off from a critical water supply. This means we have been impacted by blue-green algae potentially all year — and that was during a high flow period.
- Murrumbidgee and other NSW rivers are at a standstill with no water coming through. The system has an evaporation problem – if you top up the dam, it increases the evaporation.
- Decommissioning of the Lower Darling System – intentional, deliberate decommissioning which means the Murrumbidgee and other rivers have to deliver the water to South Australia.
- Cubbie Station creates huge issues. They should only be allowed to exist for a maximum of 5 more years. They should have the right to sell it back, but otherwise, we should take it back. They do nothing but export cheap fibres to places that have slave labour. Does nothing for our community.



- The media is wrong and biased but influencing people's perceptions. We feel like we are battling the media for the truth. It's not just the media causing misinformation; people are telling lies intentionally to the media.
- Riparian rights in NSW – you are limited by how much you can pull out at a particular rate.
- There are too many differences in rules, regulations and conditions. There is no standardisation.
- Not enough high security entitlement.
- A lot of uncertainty exists for the next generation coming in.
- Concerned about the impact of investors entering the market, e.g. Chinese superannuation funds paying \$90,000 per ha. They will continue to purchase which will have considerable impacts in the future. Investors are driving up water prices and speculating should not be allowed. Australia is the only nation that allows the sale of water, and it is a travesty – Allowing foreign speculators to affect our sovereignty.
- Good soldier-settlement schemes – good little community with good schools.
- Taxpayers are paying for the losses of investments. Almond plantations plant big and lose for a long time and taxpayers fund this loss.
- Family farms are struggling because they cannot pay the same rate as corporate. It is hard to complete – not a free market because there is no competition.
- Corporates are not buying the entitlements but purchasing temporary water or leasing. Affects the prices of temporary water. Corporates are also not contributing to the community.
- Horticulture requires water every year. If you miss water for a season, you are up for \$35,000 per ha to replant it.
- Purchasing land without water is the norm now, but this creates an in-built water demand on their investment.
- Water market is too volatile. It is of an increasingly higher value which hurts a lot of people but is also a big risk. It could rain tomorrow, and the market would shut down.
- Climate change is creating additional variability and putting reliability at risk. There is an acceleration of climate change, and people need to accept the science behind it. The climate affects social and economic conditions.
- The reengineering of Menindee has changed things up there. In recent years, the Menindee Lakes has delivered water to the Lower Darling and Broken Hill. This is breaking down with the pipeline.
- The environmental watering on the Murray that caused the blackwater event was a disaster. They needed to do it slowly to get the water over.
- Feel like we are not given information – so much confusion and misunderstanding. Why was the Broken Hill pipeline linked with the 450GL for the Murray-Darling Basin? And who owns the South Australian desalination plant? Why was that all tied together?



- Government has created an environment of no trust within the community. We feel like the government is lying.

[When asked: *What are the social issues affecting your community?*]

- The community has plenty of opportunity and development. We have enough services here and public servants. Mildura is drawing people out of the little towns which are dying, and the population is growing at about 2 per cent.
- We are in a transition period right now. There were lots of soldier settler farms which were never going to make it. Now the bigger family-owned farms are taking over with better technology and techniques. Growing larger farms will create more opportunities for the region – will create more employment
- Concerns regarding the younger generation. Young people do not want to own their own properties – they don't have the capital to purchase the land anyway. They want to get paid and go on holidays.
- Family farms are struggling without backpackers/foreign workers. They need permanent staff to run and service the tractors and systems.
- Foreign workers made up 30% of the workforce, but they run away when they see government men. They are also unwilling to put down roots and have kids which affect other social aspects of the community, e.g. schools are not getting built. There have also been lots of inappropriate workplace arrangements.
- The area is going to be really hard hit by climate change. We have already hit the IPCC temperature change here. This also affects population trends – if we get 40 degrees for two weeks at a time, people will not come here.
- We are struggling to find professionals to come and live in the area, e.g. vets, doctors. There are not enough doctors in the region – one doctor for every 4,800 people. In Melbourne, it is 1 for every 900. In the Mallee, it is 1 for every 12,000 or more.
- Most people do believe that the Basin Plan is a good plan.

2. Potential actions, opportunities and solutions

[When asked: *What does 'success' for your community look like?*]

- There is too much bureaucratic process – need to cut the red tape. The process also consumes a lot of revenue.
- Better water quality and an increase in life-expectancy – the water here is putrid, and the quality is an issue. We have a ten-year life expectancy difference between here and Melbourne.
- Actions against blue-green algae blooms.
- We need to deal with the over-water-extraction along the Lower Darling.
- We need to deconstruct the massive dams on the Hay Plain.



- Webster now has hug dams and huge channels. Now it is being bought by a Canadian firm!
- There needs to be consistency – the rules have to be the same across all states. All states need the same measuring system and water sharing plans should also be the same.

[When asked: *What roles can governments, industry, non-profit groups, First Nations, communities and individuals play in supporting prosperous and sustainable Basin communities?*]

- There should be an independent committee for each river that should be able to look into and report on the condition of each river back to the community.
- Not enough telemetry across the water system. How can you hope to manage it if there is no attempt to measure the water? Nothing in the Basin Plan about measuring or metering. We put in a meter years ago, but no one has ever come to check it.
- Floodplain harvesting at the top of the system needs to be looked at. It is a major issue – there is beautiful soil up the top and people will want to plant cotton and other horticulture up there.



Key Messages from Wentworth Roundtable Session

11:15 am-1:15 pm, 9th October 2019, Wentworth Town Hall

Overview

This document summarises key messages from engagement, focusing on:

1. Current social and economic conditions in the community
2. Potential actions, opportunities and solutions

These two topics reflect the structure of the engagement sessions, and consultation questions asked. This document reflects what the Panel heard during consultation but does not necessarily reflect the views of the Panel.

Detailed information regarding specific individuals has been withheld for privacy, and key points have been summarised and grouped where repeated. This is not a transcript of the meeting.

1. Current social and economic conditions

[When asked: *How would you describe the current health and prosperity of your community?*]

- The health of the industry is getting worse – want to see this turnaround.
- From a council perspective, we feel like we are going to these consultations again and again but never hear anything back.
- There is a disconnect between state and federal government. They never agree or want to do anything, and no one takes responsibility for problems. Lower Darling irrigators are being sacrificed for this process – feel like we are a problem being passed between different government bodies. We specifically feel like there is a huge reluctance from state and federal governments to look into this area which wears down our morale over time.
- Feel like government/people in Canberra do not fully understand what is being done to families out here. There is arrogance in the government and a lack of heart in the way we have been treated has created trauma in the community. If we were a single corporate company, the government would be bending over backwards to help us, but because we are a series of family farms, we are being let go.
- The impact of reliability changes on smaller farms is huge. Every time a farm goes, it is a school that closes or a teacher that leaves etc. The degree of impact we are about to see is significant.
- We are all agreed that the Basin Plan should continue, but we asked about the social and economic impacts of the Plan back then and have still not had an answer.
- People do not have enough water, and it is a national disgrace. The problem started with the sell-off of water.



- The entire MDB needs to be considered as a whole – when the MDBA just did the Northern Basin Review, we begged them to consider what was happening here, but they said it was not part of it. We realised that things were not looked at from a perspective concerning the entire Basin.
- Feel a complete sense of abandonment. We feel neglected and forgotten. Any benefits are only being experienced by a select few.
- Fish deaths were the first time people paid attention to this area despite the fact we have been waving a flag about this for two decades now.
- Historically, there has always been physical access to water for stock and domestic uses; now we might be looking at bores. A lot of farmers (historical family generation farms) however are still closing down. The river was a boundary so we cannot use those pastures – our land is going.
- This drought hit us 12 months faster than it used to. The very fast drawdown of the lakes causes the drought to hit faster and harder. Not only do we not have water coming out of the lakes, but also the upstream flow is gone.
- The lakes were not even hit as hard during the Millennium Drought. We protested to the MDBA at the time about the water drawdown but got no respite from the last drawdown, no chance to recover. The MDBA was told the damage they would do, and they were arrogant. We were all flabbergasted by the arrogance of a government body. How little they were there to protect the environment or the people here.
- Feel like there are expectations which lead to disappointment, time and time again. There was water which could have come from upstream and didn't. Then recently the channel in Torrumberry. How could they not get in there and clear it? The MDBA is arrogant and not listening at all.
- Mildura has the size to attract the industry, and about 1/3 of the economy of this area is tourism. Most of that is on the NSW side. Tourism cannot be neglected.
- Cost of temporary water continues to climb and will start to affect growers here.
- Compared to the Millennium Drought, we now have ten times the amount of almonds. If it goes dry now, water might go well over \$1,200. Almonds have killed dairy and rice – there is no fodder, no hay. What happens to the livestock?
- Management of the river has been too poor. This must be improved upon.
- The current water sharing plan, the text, does not have any mention of translucent flows at all. We don't get the first flush.
- The obligation to deliver to South Australia means that Menindee is being worked too hard and they have to take the water out of here. This only highlights how important the combined system is.
- Water quality is a huge concern:
 - The health of the river is affecting the health of the people – causing rashes, infections, staph infections, auto-immune conditions, antibiotic resistance. It is widespread.
 - Local government is well aware of the health issues, but there is silence at the state and federal level.



- Water quality is not being included in water sharing plans/regulation – seems entirely outside of river management rules. It's a problem if you cannot swim in the river or the fish are dying. This should be covered in the Water Act.
- There is no accurate data on health and diseases here – everything should be reported, so there is a real perspective on where the water is poison and what we can do about it.
- There is a northern Basin and a southern Basin, but no one seems concerned about this neck of the woods in the middle.
- The metering is tokenistic. More needs to be done.

[When asked: *Looking back, what have been the major trends and drivers impacting your community, and how do you view these looking forward?*]

- Right now, all the work is being driven by volunteers, and we are losing hope and drive.
- Feel like we cannot keep going to these meeting and educating authorities/government when it is not having an impact.

2. Potential actions, opportunities and solutions

[When asked: *What do you see as the main inhibitors or facilitators of positive change and why?*]

- Inhibitors include the northern irrigation industry and the state and Federal governments.
- Queensland needs to do more, as well. We often point at NSW irrigators, but more needs to be done on the Queensland side.
- There has been an active policy to depopulate this area.
- ABS data is inaccurate – frustrating because it is affecting decisions being made regarding us. We have communicated our concerns to them.
- Local fishing is missing from the picture – we are missing out on something worth billions, but our fish stocks might not even exist anymore.

[When asked: *What does 'success' for your community look like?*]

- Healthy environment (base health of the river) and a healthy community which leads to a healthy economy. There has been a focus on economics away from the community.
- The government needs to prioritise a diversity of production systems.
- Being paid out for the loss of reliability is the first step. No one can go forward without receiving compensation for the loss of their water.



- Young people need to be able to know that they can look forward throughout their life and know they will be covered. Right now, every stage in our life cycle is being compromised.

[When asked: *What roles can governments, industry, non-profit groups, First Nations, communities and individuals play in supporting prosperous and sustainable Basin communities?*]

- Need more accountability and operation from the government at all levels. It is a deficiency in the integrity of the decision-making process.
- Government representatives need to respect the knowledge of locals and learn from them – currently, treat locals in a trite and arrogant manner.
- There is a big difference between how the big end of town is handled compared to how we are being treated. There are numerous examples of it – we are not able to hire consultants, nor make donations. This deficiency has made the whole system unbalanced over the previous ten to twenty years.
- We are individual farmers. It should not be our responsibility to fix the river. But we are forced to.
- The government needs to have more empathy for our community – government process indicates clear lack of empathy. The minutes also always miss the mark – they sanitise the emotion and do not capture the feeling because government representatives (including the MDBA) cannot have a bad event.
- We have no faith that our submissions make any impact. If we stop turning up at these meetings however, we lose our voice. We are not being valued or heard, and we are not being given a fair chance to contribute to policy or have a meaningful contribution.
- There is a lack of experience in all of this.



Key Messages from Barmera Roundtable Session

3:30 pm – 5:30 pm, 9th October 2019, Central Irrigation Trust

Overview

This document summarises key messages from engagement, focusing on:

1. Current social and economic conditions in the community
2. Potential actions, opportunities and solutions

These two topics reflect the structure of the engagement sessions, and consultation questions asked. This document reflects what the Panel heard during consultation but does not necessarily reflect the views of the Panel.

Detailed information regarding specific individuals has been withheld for privacy, and key points have been summarised and grouped where repeated. This is not a transcript of the meeting.

1. Current social and economic conditions

[When asked: *How would you describe the current health and prosperity of your community?*]

- Mental health issues are growing – in the last drought, they were present too, but mainly with the small producers. The larger producers are becoming more vulnerable too now – more anxiety and stress.
- The drought has hit us faster than we assumed it would – sense of futility came on much quicker. We have not fully recovered from the last event, and the cumulative impacts make it harder.
- Listening to the media makes it sound like nothing is happening here like it is happening elsewhere. However, we really are feeling it here, especially in the dryland areas.
- After the producers go, we expect a number of the processing facilities are likely to be left idle. We expect they will be underutilised, and jobs are likely to go.
- Even average rains won't be enough to right us again.
- The community is quite polarised right now. Those that held their entitlement have the water now, have seen their capital gains, and can even trade off the excess. Those that rely on temporary water are those that are most vulnerable. The second lot are probably the ones who were told to sell water and to expand rapidly and are now feeling it. Banks will unlikely want to continue supporting some of these.
- Basin Plan recovery masked many impacts.
- Our footprint has grown after water recovery. We are starting to see the impacts of water recovery now. Unless the footprint is diminished, we are at real risk.



- The Victorian government allowed unabated development and now has to figure out how to deal with it. It has left the Lower Murray out to dry and to fend to itself. This report is the first to put information out there. Inept government policy has allowed excessive development that was poorly planned.
- There is a view that the price of water will go to \$10,000. Lots of guys have held on and are slowly and clumsily learning about water markets. If we last a couple more years, we will see a number drop out – if things stay dry, our 950 growers will be 400. It is harder to know what happens to our overall production capacity. We are increasingly unable to compete to purchase water. We can compete to \$500 if we are pushing. Up to \$800 is just inflating the debt levels.
- A 40 ha – 1,000-ton producer is a smaller one and can manage the overheads and provide for one family. Above this level, you require staff and have bills to pay. There is significantly more pressure put on these people. The 5,000-ton producers are under much more pressure – have credit providers and others knocking at their door.
- A lot of the smaller almond producers have taken on a lot of debt to put the trees in the ground and have not had time to recoup their expenses. Even with robust business planning, they would not have been planning for prices this high.
- Many of the farmers do not have the buffer in their balance sheet or revenue to deflect these challenges.
- Lots of people do not see themselves as business people. They only see themselves as producers and are proud to do so. No more than 10-15% of our 952 growers are financially literate.
- We do not have sufficient data capture. We have no systems that link financial and non-financial. You might have a good accounting system but without a way to link it to your production system, how do you have confidence? A lot of people are still managing based on the flexibility of their overdraft. The Banking Royal Commission has tightened things up big time. Also, no data on the intricacies of each of our smaller communities.
- We have an incoming suicide pandemic. The data is unavailable, but it is a real and present problem. There is a void of services to help our community with mental health. They will not show you where to go.
- Families are struggling, and it is affecting children. A large percentage of the enrolments at school depend on school breakfasts to eat.
- There is a huge amount of pride. People do not want to be upfront and open about this. We need to address this in a public manner.
- Commodity prices are not too bad. Socio-economic conditions are not great here. Twenty per cent of houses are under rental stress, although it is not all doom-and-gloom.
- Corporates are taking a bigger share of the returns for farming. However, they are not planning on passing it back throughout the community. The big industries' wealth is not retained within the community.
- Collaborative farming is used well here to reduce overheads.



[When asked: *What makes your region or community different – what are the major strengths and opportunities, or challenges?*]

- Good to see a shift in the industry. Seeing tourism also come through to support it – ecotourism has been a real positive. It creates a strong secondary industry but again, it is on the back of water.
- Corporate knowledge, history and growing skill are strengths. Delivering a strong, world-class product to market.
- The Murray River is a key strength both to agriculture and tourism. Good land quality. There is a desert and river interaction which is unique.
- We are close to Adelaide. This region can get 200mm of rainfall, that is unique.
- Great infrastructure. Great roads, for the most part.
- Biosecurity is a major strength.
- Growing middle class globally will build demand. We can build our value-add processing and do better. The Federal government is backing the \$100 billion agriculture target. Opportunity to take advantage of clustering and value-chains. Labour availability. Succession planning. Agri-business is gaining a better reputation.
- Need to account for structural change, especially for an aging population.
- Education opportunities are important.
- We have some pretty innovative people here.
- We need to figure out how to add more value to that megalitre.
- SA R&D is hopeless. We have to do it all ourselves. There is not enough effective R&D being done.
- We need to discourage the idea that kids need to go to university. It just adds pressure. Kids study for jobs that just are not in the Riverland, so they will not come back here, no matter what.
- The infrastructure system is amazing here. This is a progressive irrigation district, and we have done well out of the Basin Plan by showing a history of responsible water management. It does not seem to be recognised upstream. One downside is that we have missed out on grants because our systems are already so efficient.
- The million-dollar drought relief has taken the pressure off of the council.

[When asked: *Looking back, what have been the major trends and drivers impacting your community, and how do you view these looking forward?*]

- It takes less people to do what we do now.
- There is a perception that things are of less value if prices are low.
- The transition from annual to permanent has removed the buffer of water that gave us flexibility.
- There is a scary degree of misunderstanding about our community and South Australia. People are angry with us here. The parochialism is scary, and it can be



destructive. The them-and-us is much worse and much more destructive now than in the past.

[When asked: *How do you believe water management and reform has changed your community? If so, can you describe how?*]

- Unbundling of land and water has had a massive impact.
- The opening up of the water market has been a good thing. We definitely would not have survived the last drought without it. The market is going through an adjustment. We are midway through that adjustment, and the pain we see now is part of that. It will be brutal but will get us there.
- We spent all that money and did nothing to control the footprint. That left unchecked demand, especially in Victoria. Victoria allowed anyone to come in and sink a limited amount of money to plant away. Now we are suffering the effects of that change. Everyone is blaming the water funds, but they are doing exactly what we would all be doing.
- We have lost the passion and focus under the Basin Plan.
- The water-side is complex. We are good producers, not necessarily good water traders.

2. Potential actions, opportunities and solutions

[When asked: *What do you see as the main inhibitors or facilitators of positive change and why?*]

- Our region has mechanised and gone bulk. Sunraysia has gone high-value and is exporting to China.
- An inhibitor at the moment is the first round of investment that went into this season was put in twenty years ago. We are going to require capital investment to be put in, which is hard in a drought.
- We need to embrace agricultural tech and digital technology to stay current. Farm planning tools would have a huge impact on making us better.
- Emerging leaders and succession planning.
- There is a total disconnect between the internship program and how to make it manageable.
- Our service providers are competing with each other rather than working together for government funds.

[When asked: *What does 'success' for your community look like?*]

- Reversal of the negative trends.
- Provision of services and amenities and access to other cities.



- Population growth.
- Innovation

[When asked: *What roles can governments, industry, non-profit groups, First Nations, communities and individuals play in supporting prosperous and sustainable Basin communities?*]

- Need a common approach across the jurisdictions.
- We are geographically isolated. We have the opportunities to work together on this and do something special and focused on our needs.
- We need a shared purpose and to plan ahead, not just roll things out during a crisis.
- We need working relationships with the government so we can express our needs and work with them when it is required.
- We need certainty from the government – there is a policy vacuum which is creating uncertainty and inhibiting growth. Government risk is hurting individuals at the moment. The policy settings need to be enduring and ongoing, especially in water.
- We need a strong cohesive approach to migration.
- The government needs to put together the framework and then make it accessible and funded when communities want it.
- We could collect resource rent on water and use it to fund long-term investments.



Key Messages from Loxton Drop-In Session

9 am – 11 am, 10th October 2019, Loxton Research Centre

Overview

This document summarises key messages from engagement, focusing on:

1. Current social and economic conditions in the community
2. Potential actions, opportunities and solutions

These two topics reflect the structure of the engagement sessions, and consultation questions asked. This document reflects what the Panel heard during consultation but does not necessarily reflect the views of the Panel.

Detailed information regarding specific individuals has been withheld for privacy, and key points have been summarised and grouped where repeated. This is not a transcript of the meeting.

1. Current social and economic conditions

[When asked: *How would you describe the current health and prosperity of your community?*]

- People struggling from the effects of water running out. Some tried to expand their business during this time, and their businesses got hit.
- If we stopped the evaporation in the Lower Lakes, none of this would have happened. The evaporation down there is much higher than 800 GL. It is much more like 1,400 GL. If we gave that water to local irrigators, it would save our family farms.
- They will not turn on the desalination plant. There is not enough power. They had the choice of giving us water or running the air conditioning. They chose to run the air conditioning.
- There is a flood going past, sending water to the Lower Lakes. At \$800 per ML, and we are wasting it trying to keep the mouth open.
- Not only do the farms go, but the shops shut down. These are all businesses which send kids to school. It has all been taken out. If you drive around our district now, it is all vacant.
- Our senator gave away 480 GL on the Lower Darling — Anne Ruston. It has stopped the Lower Darling running.
- Has anyone done a demographic survey of what has happened since the buyback? Who is doing the study of this?
- There was a lot of money spent in NSW and Victoria, so they brought in the 3IP scheme. It should have come to the growers. If you want to rehabilitate the irrigation system with the 3IP scheme, you can get 1.75 times the value of the water. It is the big guys who have access to the money and are doing this.



- There is an age demographic problem. The middle-aged people have gone, and young people leave and never come back. People who go to university study something else and do not come back. If agriculture were doing better, more young people would be coming back.
- The top third is expanding and doing all right. The bottom third has dropped out. The middle third is hanging on.
 - With the top third, what happens if the commodity prices fall through or if interest rates shift? We have high-interest rates, a high Australian dollar. We have been getting a kicked in the guts from everything here.
 - With the bottom third that went bankrupt, no one considered what happened to the relationships, families and households. It is gut-wrenching stuff to lose your property – you lose your self-esteem, your self-worth, and no one is talking about it.
- What is happening now is a form of extortion. You have to pay for water, but we cannot afford it – no-one pays their bill on time. On top of having to pay, our water is getting restricted. Frustrated that only we (the irrigators) have water restrictions. Normal people on the street have no restrictions and can water his lawn all he wants. We sit back and let it happen.
- The economy is suiting some but not others.
- The Basin Plan was built on a lie! The Lower Lakes is not freshwater! There was some United Nations thing, but it is all a lie!
- What happened on the moratorium on water extractions? You see all the new plantations and cannot see how there could be a moratorium.
- We feel like the politicians have a low degree of interest.
- The equity was drained out in the Millennium Drought. It was wiped out, and not many farmers were able to build the equity back up.
- The big banks have contributed to the problem. They can choose to let us sit or make us walk away.
- Huge evaporation issue. Two-thirds of our 1,850 GL is evaporated off. The evaporation rate here is 1.5 m per year. If you multiply it by the surface area of the Lower Lakes, that is 1,400 GL! They cannot make it rain, but they can stop the evaporation.
- The restrictions on irrigators, on these family farms, is only because of the Lower Lakes. The value of the water in those Lower Lakes is so low because of the salinity.
- If we opened the barrages, we could save the dairy industry today.
- From a non-irrigator perspective, we see Renmark thriving. We see investment and development. The attitude from irrigators are more accepting and are better placed to deal with drought.
- The outlook is more positive now than last time.
- Career pathways: our council is doing a good job and being progressive.
- Our tourism industry has been a backstop to our region. The town gets packed when the river is healthy, and it is beautiful here especially along the river, which is a



strength. If the tourism businesses were closed (the brewery or the coast roasters) it would be hard to encourage people to move here or bring their partners/families.

- Mental health concerns are increasing here. A lot of people are really stressed.
- Feel like no one is listening. We appreciate that people come and do these consultations but still feel like no one else is listening to what the communities are saying.
- Lots of people are focusing on watering certain patches, but not all of it. More crop per drop. They are being forced to make decisions about how they irrigate.

[When asked: *Looking back, what have been the major trends and drivers impacting your community, and how do you view these looking forward?*]

- We have lost a third of our farmers. There were exit packages then. Now we are back to where we were prior to the last drought.
- It is not the number of growers that protect the community and the irrigation district. It is the volume of water pumped. There is enough water demand at the moment for Renmark Irrigation the way things are.
- Healthcare is a growing industry in the Riverland.

[When asked: *How do you believe water management and reform has changed your community? If so, can you describe how?*]

- There is a lack of transparency around the water market which is frustrating.
- There are different players in the market – there are irrigators who need this water to survive, then there are others who use the water markets to profit. One lot only has capital at certain times in the year; others have lots of capital and can deploy at any time. The inequity is unfair.
- If you don't have transparency around why it is tough and why, if you cannot see what is happening behind the scenes, it makes it tougher. It adds to the uncertainty because you cannot understand the risk.

2. Potential actions, opportunities and solutions

[When asked: *What do you see as the main inhibitors or facilitators of positive change and why?*]

- There is an urgent need for action. We cannot sit on our hands and wait for the rain. We need to urgently address the evaporation issue.
- There are pictures on Facebook sent every week showing Cubbie's storages as full. That comes out every week.
- No one is providing information on the water. Social media can be very negative. The community looks good seems terrible on social media.



- Attitude is a huge problem. If you have a negative mindset, you cannot see past it. If you have a negative mindset, then read it on social media, it just makes it worse.
- Like the last drought, the irrigators are not spending, which hurts everyone.

[When asked: *What roles can governments, industry, non-profit groups, First Nations, communities and individuals play in supporting prosperous and sustainable Basin communities?*]

- The government needs to wake up to the risk of what is coming. If our politicians do not acknowledge that this is a mismanaged drought, we are all doomed.
- Need trustworthy and truthful information. The media does not report all the facts about the river. You need to purchase media from the other states.
- This drought has created a battle between the states. Not between the government but of irrigators on irrigators.
- Diversifying our income would be great, so we have resilience.
- Our town needs the ability to allow professionals to come work here. If we had the internet and the capacity to work remotely, it would bring people here.



Key Messages from Murray Bridge Roundtable Session 1

2 pm – 4 pm, 10th October 2019, NRM Office

Overview

This document summarises key messages from engagement, focusing on:

1. Current social and economic conditions in the community
2. Potential actions, opportunities and solutions

These two topics reflect the structure of the engagement sessions, and consultation questions asked. This document reflects what the Panel heard during consultation but does not necessarily reflect the views of the Panel.

Detailed information regarding specific individuals has been withheld for privacy, and key points have been summarised and grouped where repeated. This is not a transcript of the meeting.

1. Current social and economic conditions

[When asked: *How would you describe the current health and prosperity of your community?*]

- There is a changing demographic here. We've seen a lot of families leave due to the drought, loss of dairy, and loss of our fishing industry out of the Coorong. All of this has taken out 200 kids from the school (about half), and we have empty shopfronts (26 businesses have left Mannum).
- Used to be mainly dairy here but now we see more almonds coming in – once they are planted, there is less employment sticking around.
- We are experiencing growth in Mannum. People are coming from elsewhere. Now there are social problems coming in.
- There has been a big impact on mental health – huge spike in issues in the last 12-18 months. There have been three suicides in the last few weeks.
 - The pressures on farmers by vegans, environmentalists and so on are having a bigger effect on mental health than anything else. It is building up on people.
 - Families are breaking up – the wife and kids go to a bigger town, and the farmer is left in an empty house.
- The only water coming through the Coorong is CEWH water. Without it, there is no water. Our town relies on environmental water.
- There are no sources for vouchers of food or fuel. Police used to do it.
- The ongoing costs of running a business is a lot to deal with and adds a lot of pressure. When you have employees, you run out of money because you have to pay people.



- Banks are not giving any support and not providing housing loans for the young people who want to stay. They have become even harsher after the Royal Commission.
- Too many other high costs. The cost of power is huge and paying rent is also significant. Some people have not drawn a wage for four months and eat out of the business. We get no response, no help. Sometimes we have no power/see lights flickering which makes things worse.
- There are several infrastructure issues that make it harder.
- Huge water security issues here. If it gets dry or we do not have enough water pushing the saltwater down, we cannot get the water out. The water quality and the water price are the crucial things.
- We are seeing more private pipelines of water for dryland farms.
- The house prices are plummeting, and people are unable to sell their houses and retire comfortably because people do not want to move into here.
- The state and federal governments are shirking their responsibilities.
- Significant drug issues – it has completely taken over our community.
 - The government sold a housing development ‘Murray Bark’. A single private owner now rents it out, and it is the ice capital. Our police spend 80 per cent of their time there.
 - Murray Bridge had the highest concentration of illicit drugs in our sewerage.
 - We have so much security in the hospital because of the drug issue.
 - Marijuana and heroin used to put people to sleep. Now they go nuts and cannot recall what they have done.
- We run a program to help with the chronically unemployed. It helps with the basics and is having a good effect but is based on Federal funding and might run out in 2 years.
- The restarting of the abattoir has been quite important for sucking up the lower levels of employment.
- There is a lack of communication and a lack of confidence. We do not see a government that cares any more. People are not going to commit or reinvest into their community if there is no commitment from the government to support them. There are only a few government and council programs which are successful, producing some regeneration.
- Crime cuts the confidence out of the community. There is not enough police out here to handle it. Police here do 24-hour shifts and get no thanks for it.
- No sense of giving to the community. We have 2,500 holiday-shacks. Used to have fishing people who were happy to give to the community. Now you have business people who want to come, have a good time, and do not want to give back. They’re a high-income group, just coming for the weekend, bringing their own supplies from out of town and buying nothing here.
- People come with nothing out of the northern suburbs of Adelaide and do not contribute to the community. There are the 457 visas who come and do not engage with the community.



- Corporate farms who come in and do not give back to the community. The wealth has been exported out of the community.
- There was a change once there was deregulation and unbundling. We have had a ton of agglomeration. You have to get bigger to make money. So there is a migration of people off the farm. People leave and go to town or go to the city.
- We feel like we have lost our equity and our superannuation – businesses used to provide for our super, but no one is going to buy that business.
- The drink driving rules have killed country social life. People won't go to the tavern any more.

[When asked: *What makes your region or community different – what are the major strengths and opportunities, or challenges?*]

- The waterfront and tourism is a real strength of this community. We would be a desert without the river. There is a more active tourism conglomerate promoting this region as a whole. The community is owning and promoting it.
- We have durability and resilience.
- There is a big variety of industry.
- Murray Bridge is a real hub, especially with the train.
- Mannum wants to ride on the coattails of Murray Bridge.
- T&R is driving a lot of the economic recovery in Murray Bridge.
- Monarto is doing really well. There is a zoo and a racetrack.
- The solar farms.
- There is a lot of construction and infrastructure going around.
- The small businesses are still going despite it all. But some, e.g. hairdressers, newsagencies, cafes are leaving.
- The Millennium Drought really gave people an understanding and appreciation of what they have. It has not been long enough since the Millennium Drought for a lot of us, but we all understand it a lot better and have relationships with the government which has taught us how to better deal with things.
- The government will not support the council to help with the Coorong. We cannot get rates or support for the Coorong because of the National Park. No bins or toilets or anything.
- People in Adelaide do not understand the problem here because the tap runs.
- Being close to Adelaide is a double-edged sword. Lots of people commute out here. But there is enough closeness for the drug issue.
- When people come here, we have to provide a bonus and a bed. If we go to Adelaide, we get nothing.
- The culture of giving people a temporary job contract affects people's confidence, decision making, and investment in the community. People save instead of spending locally.



[When asked: *Looking back, what have been the major trends and drivers impacting your community, and how do you view these looking forward?*]

- Social and cultural changes are affecting the community. The young ones have everything at home and won't come out — mobile phones matter. People do not talk to each other and do not want to know each other. People used to come out for a fire because it was cold, but now people don't need or want to.
- There is a lack of transport the further away from town you get. People won't even attend a doctor's appointment because it is too expensive to come out.

[When asked: *How do you believe water management and reform has changed your community? If so, can you describe how?*]

- Water reform has reduced the confidence of people — huge impacts on irrigation farms and around rivers.
- Farm succession is causing people to sell off and move out.
- We would not have water in the Lower Lakes without CEWH water, but the price of water is too high.
- The media coverage is having a seriously negative effect. Communication is poor, and government is not doing anything. We are a good news story, and we need to get the story out there.
- The Authority rarely comes down this way. We are the forgotten people here.
- The Millennium Drought and the rehabilitation of the Coorong were positive. It has given us security and benefits for this community. We can demonstrate to other communities that there have been benefits from the process.
- No one was made to sell their water. It was voluntary. People sold and did quite well. But it left the community.
- There was a lot more retention of water entitlements here. A lot of the expansion elsewhere was based on temporary water. If our farms had to rely on temporary water, it would be doing a lot harder.
- The selling of water shut down farms. That has caused flow-on environmental effects.
- Because we have sold water, we have had to move to higher-value crops, like the Plan wanted. I can see the effect it had on people. We had 90 GL; now we are about 30 GL.
- Dairy is different and had other issues in the area.

2. Potential actions, opportunities and solutions

[When asked: *What does 'success' for your community look like?*]

- The ability to adapt and diversify. We need to not rely on one thing.



- If tourism is something we can access, then we have to do that. It has to be based around the river. We need ecotourism.
- We need to stop or slow the exodus. People need to want to live here. Want to see population growth, new businesses opening, unemployment rates lowering.
- Need the banks to give loans. People do want to live and buy here, but it is too expensive.
- Drugs are an issue. If they don't use, they deal; if they don't deal, they deliver. Getting the next hit causes people to steal and take which affects everyone else – stores are losing hundreds-of-thousands per year. The police are fighting a losing battle. Ice is particularly concerning because it is not like marijuana which makes people chill; it is crazy and is becoming associated with domestic violence.
- We need to have secure, properly shared water.
- We want everyone to appreciate the CEWH water and the effects it has.
- Adelaide, Sydney and Melbourne need to appreciate that turning on the tap is a privilege.
- Lots of positives and social opportunities. There are fishing competitions; we have float-fest. The truck show, Sounds by the River. We just need support to put that out there.

[When asked: *What roles can governments, industry, non-profit groups, First Nations, communities and individuals play in supporting prosperous and sustainable Basin communities?*]

- The government needs to be held accountable for communicating with us.
- People do not want to do things online. Government services online are difficult; MyGov adds to the confusion and difficulty. Causes everything to suffer, e.g. health, because you avoid services. If the government is going to force everyone on MyGov, they need to give support so people can do it.
- People often do not have the social network to know what is going on.
- In many of the smaller communities, there is no help. You might have a helpful neighbour, but there is a widespread lack of knowledge. Difficulty in seeking help just adds to the pressure and frustration.
- Governments need to force the banks to give us loans. With a flick of the pen, they could change our economic future.
- When the railway left Taillem Bend and flogged off the houses really cheap, it gave those people an ability to own something, and they have done really well out of it.
- Good and early communication. Make it effective. The government needs to come out and talk to people.
- We need inclusive communities.
- Negative communication has real impacts.



Key Messages from Murray Bridge Roundtable Session 2

9 am – 11 am, 11th October 2019, NRM Office

Overview

This document summarises key messages from engagement, focusing on:

1. Current social and economic conditions in the community
2. Potential actions, opportunities and solutions

These two topics reflect the structure of the engagement sessions, and consultation questions asked. This document reflects what the Panel heard during consultation but does not necessarily reflect the views of the Panel.

Detailed information regarding specific individuals has been withheld for privacy, and key points have been summarised and grouped where repeated. This is not a transcript of the meeting.

1. Current social and economic conditions

[When asked: *How would you describe the current health and prosperity of your community?*]

- A lot of bad feeling in irrigated business.
- A lot of people in this area are extremely concerned about what is going to happen below Lock 1.
- Serious mental health issues - in the last year, we have seen more farmers giving up or committing suicide. We have tried to provide a mental health service, but it is not enough. People do not want to talk about it. There is a real pride issue.
- The dairy industry is under a lot of pressure. Lots of the big buyers are paying low milk prices; the drought is making the cost of feed increase exponentially. You used to need 15 L per cow; now it is 25 L. People cannot make that work.
- The amount of farmland has decreased precipitously.
- Struggling to find workers. We have to pay extra for them to get here, but then they won't stay. We try to focus on local workers but are forced to get foreign workers on 457 visas. A lot of people fail drug tests and cannot be employed (need to pass drug tests because they use heavy machinery).
- We cannot find people who want to own a farm.
- There is not enough industry here; the pool is shrinking.
- There is a large pool of people who are in lower socio-economic conditions who do not see the need to work.
- We have been growing rapidly in the last few years. But we cannot grow any larger because we do not have enough people here to do the work.



- Lots of the scientists and local government workers here travel here from the Adelaide hills.
- There is a bit of a split. We have about equal people importing and exporting workers.
- There are a number of government initiatives to bring the workers up to speed. There are employment programs and the L-to-P program.
- We have a massive loss of social services. The population is declining for various reasons. Then you lose a teacher or a doctor. Once you lose that, they do not come back.
- When Thomas Foods left, there was an immediate social impact. A number of local businesses jumped in to help them. But there was a number of flow-on impacts on other businesses.
- There was good money, but people produced too much and brought on too many pigs. Then the fodder price went up, and people could not make money any more.
- There is a lot of need for people to take a breath, get their head above the parapet and make a reasonable decision.

[When asked: *What makes your region or community different – what are the major strengths and opportunities, or challenges?*]

- Really strong regional voices and great leadership.
- There is a great document that we put together that showed a collective group of people with collective issues. We included a bunch of ideas on how to fix them.
- We are all here because we want to make the region work. There are some pretty big businesses right, which are here and making things work.
- We have water here, land here, cheap gas here. We have a lot of successful producers supplying Adelaide and a lot more.
- Lots of industries are coming in, and the region is getting busy, but it needs people. We have done as much as we can with the people we have.

[When asked: *Looking back, what have been the major trends and drivers impacting your community, and how do you view these looking forward?*]

- Young people do not want the jobs that are being offered. E.g. No one young wants to be a cheese producer. No one wants to make meat. No one wants to learn or drive a forklift. This affects us because we do not have the next generation of workers.
- It is a cultural issue. The threat is: “If you do not pick up your grades, you will end up being a cheese producer.” The schools need to work on it.

[When asked: *How do you believe water management and reform has changed your community? If so, can you describe how?*]



- Water reform meant that there was not enough industry here.
- Dairy farmers cannot afford the water, so they are leaving. Their land has also gone to rubbish. Lots of dairy farmers can make more money leasing their water than they could by using water and producing.
- There is a lot of misunderstanding of the water reforms – we need to educate people efficiently. People need to work out how to maximise the inputs as a cost, and that is not well understood.
- Some people can make more money with the water they have. If you cannot make money with water, you will lose. There are some people who are using technology and techniques and are doing better with it. The people who are more efficient, getting the value out of the water are those that will survive.
- Almond guys don't need to be as efficient they can splash water around. But that whole thing won't last forever. What happens when almonds go. Do we want all our eggs in one basket?
- South Australia has pressurised systems and uses water very efficiently. They don't do that upstream. If they were to use efficiently there, that would produce a whole lot of extra water.
- Need adaptability to the changes – it is more than just farm and financial planning. It is more pragmatic than that. A lot of individuals are still doing what their grandparents were doing it, and that does not work anymore.
- Maintaining and being in the now is what these people are caught in – people are just trying to survive and not planning ahead. They don't have the breathing space or the capacity to deal with it and try something else. If they had the breathing space to try a different business model, they might do it a lot better.
- The Basin Plan has been great for this region. The environmental water has done a lot for this region. We forget about the environmental side and how the environment helps with tourism.
- The dollar value of tourism has been huge for this region. We are neglecting it.

2. Potential actions, opportunities and solutions

[When asked: *What do you see as the main inhibitors or facilitators of positive change and why?*]

- We need a workforce that is reliable, and we can be sure will turn up on day two or three. We have enough supply, regardless of water, but we just do not have enough people to process it. Lack of people means we also can't expand.
- We have enough capacity latent in the existing producers. They just are not investing right now.
- Farmers are not keen to expand with power, gas, insurance, fodder. Otherwise, they would expand.
- The current farmers need to clear their debt.



- There are a number of people here who could get into dairying quickly. They have farms that are mothballed.

[When asked: *What roles can governments, industry, non-profit groups, First Nations, communities and individuals play in supporting prosperous and sustainable Basin communities?*]

- There have been so many enquires in the Murray, but nothing ever changes. It's no wonder that people have lost interest.
- Government has a responsibility to educate the people impacted. If people do not understand policy or changes, they will make a decision, and probably a poor decision. With a bit of education and a bit of help, they could end up in a much better position.
- A little bit of intervention would get farmers to stay. A bit of intervention would assure supply.
- Schools are doing more to change the mentality and pathways. We need to bring the language, and the discourse needs to change there.
 - There needs to be more to pair agri-business with secondary education. We need to make it clear that there are pathways there.
 - The state government can work on the push to get people through apprenticeships or traineeship, or something else. TAFE is getting better. It is important here.
- Public transport to get here is hard.
- We need support in the other aspects of education policy, power policy, social policy to support this region.
- Continual commitment to addressing employment, helping the generational unemployment. There is a pool of unemployed people here – we need to utilise that pool. There is no guarantee beyond the next year.
- We have been doing real fundamental things: time management, hygiene, health, driver's licenses etc. – need these fundamental things done.



Key Messages from Strathalbyn Roundtable Session

12 pm – 2 pm, 11th October 2019, NRM Office

Overview

This document summarises key messages from engagement, focusing on:

1. Current social and economic conditions in the community
2. Potential actions, opportunities and solutions

These two topics reflect the structure of the engagement sessions, and consultation questions asked. This document reflects what the Panel heard during consultation but does not necessarily reflect the views of the Panel.

Detailed information regarding specific individuals has been withheld for privacy, and key points have been summarised and grouped where repeated. This is not a transcript of the meeting.

1. Current social and economic conditions

[When asked: *How would you describe the current health and prosperity of your community?*]

- We have lost 20 per cent of our shops.
- The health of the river is better than it has been in a while. It was driven off the unregulated flows in 2016. The health of the river is intimately linked to the health of the community and our economy – it is so important.
 - The ecology drives the fishing industry and the tourism industry.
 - Things like birds and muscles have not been able to come back. Others like fish have come back. Some like turtles, tube-worms are starting to show signs of recovery.
 - A lot of people come to Strathalbyn because of the river. Without the river, no one would come. Either from tourism or to live.
- If we do not get the flows, things will be different in a few years. If we do not have environmental water, the condition of the community would plummet.
- The Basin Plan has helped this community.
- Migratory birds are down everywhere.
- Langhorn Creek is doing really well. Off the back of the pipeline investment.
- Some areas are getting tourism and housing coming up.
- The things you see in the media, the fear and uncertainty, it is holding things back.
- Our communities see what is happening in the northern Basin and understand what is happening. We have been through it.
- Putting an economic value on the environment undervalues it.



- Mental health issues increasing. The suicide rate was four times the national average here during the drought. Community wellbeing is tied to the environment – if you are worried about suicide, the environment has to be part of it. Changes in the environment, particularly for the worse, can drive mental health issues and suicide.
- People think we need water here for boating and sailing. That is not why we need water here. We sail as a by-product of a healthy river. If the Coorong is not healthy, the die-off will go further up.
- When there is no water, our farmers also cannot grow and spend. We realise this and recognise that we also need to divert water to the environment from here as well.
- Strathalbyn is a rural town. Langhorn Creek is big for horticulture, dairy, broadacre, we have a diverse, healthy agricultural sector in this area. Not all of it built on pumping out of the river.

[When asked: *What makes your region or community different – what are the major strengths and opportunities, or challenges?*]

- Strathalbyn has an aged care crisis. We do not have enough beds.
- We have an education problem here.
- We keep ringing the bell asking for help but only sometimes get it.
- There needs to be more support given to the transient population.

[When asked: *How do you believe water management and reform has changed your community? If so, can you describe how?*]

- Need to look at the entire Basin as a whole – it's not about taking from one group and giving it to another. We are part of a connected river.
- We have never had a managed approach to environmental water.
- The draft Basin Plan had the figures which would have kept the waterways healthy. The Basin Plan we ended up with is much less.
 - People here settled on 3,200 GL, knowing it would not be enough. But we have ended up with much less than that.
- People have been polite, but there is quite a bit of frustration and anger in this community that the Basin Plan has not been implemented properly. The politics around the Basin Plan and the exposed corruption from media, e.g. 4 Corners 'Pumped', have had incredibly large impacts on the confidence of the communities of the Basin. Feel like politicians don't understand us – have a different view of the world.
- Allocation management is a problem. There is a problem of over-allocation, but then there is a tacit agreement that water can be taken above that level. The allocation framework is still the same, despite there being less water in the system.



- The reform needs to be reinvestigated at the rule level. It needs to be redone based on where we are now.
- Climate change has not been looked into properly/incorporated into the Basin Plan.
- The numbers originally estimated as sustainable was based on a lot of those licences not being used. But they are being used now. We need to be re-evaluating the sustainable levels of take.
- We have a history of putting people in failing soldier-settlement schemes. We need to stop trying to make people irrigate on marginal land. We have somehow lost our acceptance of the way this country works.
- If you gamble on the stock market, you expect to either win or lose. In agriculture, you expect never to lose.
- We were only supposed to dredge one year in ten. But it has been dredged for the last five.
- The water that is going past now benefits four or five places along the way before it helps the Lower Lakes.
- The Lower Darling is crucial for this area. The Murray is having to do all the heavy lifting.

2. Potential actions, opportunities and solutions

[When asked: *What do you see as the main inhibitors or facilitators of positive change and why?*]

- A lack of jobs here means that people commute out to work, and a lot of money also leaves the community because people shop elsewhere. There are some employment opportunities on the horizon, but the core of people travel out of town to do their business.
- There is an opportunity around the aged care industry.
- We want Tomas Foods to take over here as well.
- Retail shops as a group would be the biggest employer — lots of farm services from here.
- It is the hub of the thoroughbred horses in SA.
- There is quite a bit of diversity here.
- This region is very underdeveloped. There needs some investment to do more to support ecotourism. Include a bike track, an information centre, an interpretive centre, walking trips supported by the indigenous population etc.
- The barrages are a huge concern going forward.
- Tourism opportunities – keeping people staying here for multiple nights is what makes the real money.