



INDEPENDENT ASSESSMENT OF SOCIAL  
AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS IN THE BASIN

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

TERMS OF REFERENCE

September 2019

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





## Overview

This document outlines final Terms of Reference and Assessment Framework as informed by public submissions and endorsed by the Independent Panel and Minister Littleproud. The final Terms of Reference and Assessment Framework have been amended based on stakeholder submissions. The key changes to the Terms of Reference and Assessment Framework aim to reflect the following:

- analysis of social and economic impacts extends beyond the agricultural sector
- more explicit inclusion of First Nations Peoples
- clarification that impacts can be both positive and negative
- clarification that impacts from ecosystem health on social and economic conditions will be considered

## Terms of Reference

The Panel received stakeholder submissions and input on the proposed Terms of Reference, and has endorsed the following Terms of Reference as final.

**A.** The review will provide an independent assessment of social and economic conditions in rural and regional communities across the Murray-Darling Basin.

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**B.** The review will assess impacts (positive and negative) of water reforms including the Basin Plan on the vulnerability, resilience and adaptive capacity of Murray-Darling Basin communities and their development potential. This will include consideration of social and economic impacts of the environmental effects of water reforms.

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**C.** The review will consider ongoing structural changes influencing different communities in the Murray-Darling Basin, and seek to separate the effects of these trends, and events such as drought, from the effects of water reform, including the Basin Plan.

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**D.** The review will support longer-term efforts to monitor and understand social and economic conditions in the Basin, and the impact (positive and negative) of water reform on different communities in the Murray-Darling Basin. This will be used by governments and leaders to help understand the outcomes of water reform, including the Basin Plan. However, this is not a review of the Basin Plan.

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**E.** The work of the Panel will explore a range of options that stimulate, support and promote healthy and sustainable rural and regional communities in the Basin.



## Assessment Framework

Stakeholder submissions also informed the draft Assessment Framework and the Independent Panel will use the following assessment framework questions to shape the review:

1. What are the visions and hopes of Basin people for themselves and their communities?
2. What have been the social and economic experiences of different Basin communities, relative to other rural and regional communities in Australia, and what have been the main drivers of these experiences?
3. What are expected to be the most significant drivers of future change, opportunity, and risk for different Basin communities?
4. What has been the impact (positive and negative) of water reform on different Basin communities to date, including relative to other drivers of change? What future changes and impacts are likely?
5. Are there thresholds for maintaining the viability of different Basin communities, in the context of water reform and other drivers of change? If so, what are these thresholds and what do they imply for these communities, governments, and other actors?
6. What strategies have the greatest potential to enhance the resilience, adaptability and wellbeing of different Basin communities?
7. What are the responsibilities and distinctive contributions of governments, industry, non-profit groups, First Nations, communities and individuals in enabling action to promote prosperous and sustainable Basin communities?