



Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Regional Australia
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra 2600

Dear Sir/Madam

Re. Inquiry into the impact of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan in Regional Australia

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Inquiry into the impact of the Murray-Darling Basin Authority's Guide to the Proposed Basin Plan on rural communities.

Introduction: Who we are

AgriFood Skills Australia is the national organization responsible for skills, and workforce development for the agrifood industry to ensure that we have the knowledge, skills, and enterprise capacity to respond to current and future industry challenges and opportunities.

AgriFood facilitates research and implements research findings to maintain innovation and best practice in the agrifood sector.

We engage in policy development with Government to link industry competence and capacity with Government policy objectives; to encourage whole of Government solutions to industry challenges; and to ensure that policy development is driven by the practical challenges of our sector including food security, labour supply, and the effects of climate change.

To maximize returns on investment in workforce development and capacity building, AgriFood takes a regional approach that involves local government, employers and employer groups, and industry sectors. The majority of agrifood industries are located in regional Australia.

The vehicle for keeping our workforce up-to-date is the National Training System. It is a flexible system that tailors training to individual as well as industry sector needs.

Background: A vital role for Skills and Workforce Development in Basin reform

Impacts of the water reform process currently being undertaken by the Australian Government and the Murray Darling Basin Authority will result in necessary adjustments by the current generation of farmers, irrigators, industries and communities to sustain strong and prosperous regional communities. Education and innovation will be critical to the smooth adoption of transitional arrangements and the implementation of sustainable agricultural and land management practice, in the Basin.

The National Training System

Through the National Training System, new approaches to land use and natural resource management can be incorporated into existing Training Packages which include conservation and land management. New Skill Sets associated with water and land management, climate change resilience and the carbon economy can be accessed by landholders and NRM practitioners either as stand-alone Skill Sets or as part of a formal qualification. Research findings on improved water intensity measures and changed land management practice can be implemented in a flexible and responsive training system.

A regional approach to skills and workforce development: The *Make it Work Initiative*

AgriFood has been working with regional bodies and local communities to support sustainable economic growth in regional Australia. *Make it Work* focuses on improving regional productivity by engaging business leaders in determining local skills and workforce needs within a region and enhancing employment opportunities associated with sustainable growth and the *Employer of Choice Initiative*¹. The program is inclusive and flexible so that the particular features, challenges, and potential of every region can be taken into account, including industry restructure. Knowledge, skills and training required for the region will address the social, economic and environmental issues associated with remaining viable and realising full economic potential.

The responsive nature of *Make it Work* makes it a suitable model for working in the Murray Darling Basin. As long as the data fed into the model is comprehensive and accurate, solutions for sustainable production and full employment in the region will be identified through cross-sectoral consultation.

Summary

AgriFood Skills Australia would be pleased to be involved in the challenge of securing a sustainable and productive Murray Darling Basin.

For further information contact Di Dibley, Policy & Program Development, AgriFood Skills Australia.

Yours faithfully

Arthur Blewitt
CEO AgriFood Skills Australia

Monday, 20 December 2010

¹ *Employer of Choice* is an Agrifood Skills Australia Initiative. Employers of Choice provide challenging jobs, competitive remuneration and careers.