

3 June 2024

Mr. John Bradley
Secretary
Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action
8 Nicholson Street
East Melbourne
VIC 3002

Dear Mr Bradley,

Submission on Planning our Basin Future Together

The Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering (ATSE) is a Learned Academy of independent, non-political experts helping Australians understand and use technology to solve complex problems. Bringing together 900 of Australia's leading thinkers in applied science, technology and engineering, ATSE provides impartial, practical and evidence-based advice on how to achieve sustainable solutions and advance prosperity.

As a major provider of water resources supporting agriculture, industry, and biodiversity, the Murray-Darling Basin's (MDB) health is paramount to its sustainability into the future. ATSE is pleased to submit its recommendations and findings to the Victoria Government's consultation process on the MDB Plan. The document attached - derived from the ["A Thriving Murray-Darling Basin in 50 Years"](#) project - highlights critical actions necessary for the sustainable management of the MDB considering evolving climate challenges. ATSE also wishes to emphasise the importance of ensuring the future of agricultural production supported by the MDB is not compromised. The attached summary provides an overview of the findings from this project, which resulted in seven recommendations for protecting the health of the MDB. Three of these recommendations particularly relevant to the Victorian Government's Basin Future consultation:

- Prioritise key elements of holistic, connected and interdependent governance for the MDB.
- Review institutional arrangements that govern property rights at a Territory, State and Commonwealth level for consistency as well as climate-proofing. Seek to mitigate inequitable benefits from institutional governance, including addressing the cultural rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.
- Ensure transparent, evidence-based and data-driven decision-making that includes short, medium and long-term modelling of environmental, economic, social and cultural impacts.

In addition to the above recommendations, the Victorian Government can support the implementation of the recommendations below that primarily fall within the Federal jurisdiction:

- Establish, maintain and resource a central data custodian for all water quantity and water quality monitoring data, all modelling and all other relevant data inputs for driving decision-making, publicly available and shared by all stakeholders.

- Establish, maintain and resource a single central public domain for all consultation, knowledge sharing, information and listing of all funded projects and programs, no matter the jurisdiction.
- Establish an independent central Water Markets Agency that operates across the Basin, providing standardised definitions, terms and contracts for water trading as well as monitoring and possibly enforcement.
- Evolve the Basin Plan including by requiring climate change and long-term impact monitoring, enhancing governance and stakeholder representation, and applying an Environmental / Social / Governance (ESG) framework.

The detailed recommendations are outlined in the attached summary document, which we hope will provide valuable insights and contribute to the success of the Victorian Government's implementation of its obligations under the Basin Plan to enable water security, agricultural production, and healthy ecosystems into the future.

ATSE thanks the Victorian Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action to provide a submission. ATSE is available for further discussions and is keen to support parties to the Basin Plan through the provision of science-based advice.

Yours sincerely

Dr Katherine Woodthorpe AO FTSE FAICD
President

Kylie Walker
Chief Executive Officer