

SACOSS CALLS FOR CALM LONG TERM THINKING TO FOLLOW MDB REPORT

Ross Womersley Executive Director of the SA Council of Social Service, responding to the release of the Guide to the Murray Darling Basin Plan today, said, “The most important thing now is for all people with an interest in the Basin to have a good chance to consider the Plan in detail and then respond.”

SACOSS believes there are three key things to consider carefully. First and foremost is whether or not the Plan will in fact deliver the environmental flows that are needed. The second is coming to an accurate conclusion about the likely socio economic impact on communities. The third is whether or not sufficient attention will be given to the social and environmental needs of SA and in particular to the needs of communities in the Riverland.

The MDB authority is recommending an environmental flow target of between 3,000GL/yr and 4,000GL/yr (equating to a 22-29% reduction on current limits). Analysis in the Plan suggests that ensuring flows below 3,000GL/yr would not meet environmental objectives, while assuring flows of over 4,000GL/yr would cause unacceptable socio-economic impact.

Womersley stated that “Most of the economic modelling appears limited to irrigation impacts and it is particularly gloomy. It is very clear that irrigation will remain a key part of the future of river communities and there is no analysis in the guide of the positive impact that might come alternative economic development models, or with income from environmental benefits.”

He went on to say that “SACOSS welcomed the Guide’s clear acknowledgment that:

‘there is an urgent need to undertake a comprehensive assessment of social and economic impacts at the community and industry level’

and further that:

‘... the government should consider examining existing community assistance packages to help potentially create new industries and employment opportunities. (pg xxviii)’

“SACOSS strongly supports these recommendations for further work on alternative economic futures, and calls for new money to put into assist such community development initiatives. With the right support there is a real opportunity for communities’ right throughout the Basin to imagine and develop economies that combine access to water with other industries.”

Womersley noted that “It is clear from the Guide that the biggest socio-economic impacts are likely to be in other states. This means there is an additional issue facing South Australian communities. We need to ensure that communities along the river in SA who are already really struggling, and will still be profoundly affected, are able get the support they desperately need.”