

**SUMMERFRUIT SA**  
**MURRAY DARLING BASIN PLAN**  
**PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION IMPLEMENTATION REVIEW**

**July 2023**

**SUBMISSION FROM SUMMERFRUIT SA**

**INTRODUCTION**

Summerfruit SA is the State's peak commodity group for the fresh market stone fruit industry. It represents some 50 growers from across the Riverland region. Our growers adopt best practice in their irrigation systems, and are committed to efficient water management and good water stewardship.

**Question 1: What issues are important to you in implementing the Basin Plan?**

- Baseline water recovery under the MDB Plan. This is important to provide balanced water security for communities, irrigators and the environment.
- Completion of the agreed infrastructure recovery works by the Basin States who have agreed to undertake those works, but failed to deliver on them.
- It is important to maintain a balance between permanent and annual cropping in the MDB to ensure MDB communities have resilience during drought
- The negative effect of the Water Market on crop diversity, cropping initiatives, new ventures and crop sustainability is becoming apparent.

**Question 2: What lessons should be learned from programs aimed at helping communities adjust to the Plan?**

- South Australian irrigators are some of the most efficient in the Basin, having adopted water-wise irrigation systems. There is limited scope for additional water recovery in SA.
- Some Basin States have done little to earn trust, having failed to deliver on identified infrastructure works agreed to in the water recovery plan. Infrastructure works still to be undertaken by those States will recover some 500 GL. These States must be held to account. The lesson learned here is that those States have failed not only their own communities, but all communities across the MDB. Those States must complete these works. There must not be any move on irrigators to recover water that the States have failed to recover. Trust in those States is low; trust and confidence needs to be re-built.
- Programs like the SA SARMS 3IP have enabled irrigators to invest in value-add activities to improve their business operations and profitability, whilst returning water for the environment, were effective.
- Whilst exit grant packages helped irrigators who availed themselves of the program, and water recovery, they actually caused harm to irrigation communities. This is evident in most irrigation communities; and there is no apparent recovery from that.
- It is doubtful that giving money to local community groups for community facilities replaces the economic activity created by productive agricultural business in the community.

**Question 4: How could a Basin Plan water recovery be done better?**

- Ensure that all players pay their part; including tardy Basin States who have failed to deliver on promised and agreed to infrastructure recovery projects.

**Question 5:** What needs to change to **deliver infrastructure and efficiency projects** under the Plan?

- Basin States commitment. The carrot of funding appears to have been insufficient – a “stick” of water recovery from the Basin State’s consumptive pool for under recovery in that State would increase the political willingness.

**Question 6:** How is **environmental water** improving the health of the Basin?

- Environmental water was critical in keeping connectivity and flow into the lower lakes during the last drought
- The maintaining of small pockets of healthy habitat on wetlands and floodplains in the lower Darling-Murray reaches through use of the water
- Use of recovered water for local watering programs

**Question 7:** What more could be done to support a **healthy working Basin**?

- The River’s natural history, prior to locking, is of years of extreme wet and extreme dry. In wet years, when storages are near full and there is unregulated flow, this opportunity should be used to create overbank flows in the lower river areas. The use of environmental water will never replace ‘natural’ over bank flow.
- In dry or drought years, excess environmental watering of flood plain areas should not occur if it will increase water restrictions.
- There appears to be no, or little overall management of ‘greenfield’ irrigation development. This is of major concern in relation to deliverability risk and irrigation sustainability; particularly in dry and drought years. We can’t have a healthy working Basin for both irrigators and the environment when deliverability and sustainability can’t be met.

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