



The Queensland Murray-Darling Committee Inc. Feedback on the Queensland Murray Darling Authority's *Position paper on localism*

Submission To:

Stakeholder Engagement Branch
Murray Darling Basin Authority
GPO Box 3001
Canberra, ACT 2601
Fax: 02 6230 7579
Email: engagement@mdba.gov.au

Submitting Organisation:

Chief Executive Officer
Queensland Murray-Darling Committee Inc.
PO Box 6243, Toowoomba QLD 4350
Phone: 07 4637 6270 Fax: 07 4632 8062
Email: geoffp@qmdc.org.au

This submission is presented by the Chief Executive Officer, Geoff Penton, on behalf of the Queensland Murray-Darling Committee Inc. (QMDC). QMDC is a regional natural resource management (NRM) group that supports communities in the Queensland Murray-Darling Basin (QMDB) to sustainably manage their natural

1.0 Background

QMDC is a community-based, not-for-profit organisation that delivers natural resource management (NRM) services across the Queensland Murray-Darling Basin. QMDC staff work the Traditional Owner and Elders in the region and a wide range of other natural resource managers, including Landcare groups, farmers and graziers, regional councils, agencies from all tiers of government, agricultural industry bodies, agribusiness, the corporate business sector, the mining and resource sectors, the health sector and communities.

QMDC'S core business is to work directly with landholders within diverse catchments and across all land tenures; assisting in changing water management practices on; contributing key service abilities to fill knowledge gaps; contributing to NRM policy developments at regional, state, national levels; and facilitating greater access to information by many community organizations.

A key element to QMDC's success has been, and continues to be, our partnership (both technical and financial) with Landcare groups in our region. Along with QMDC's technical staff, the Landcare coordinators are our frontline of interaction with the community. This partnership has enabled QMDC's technical officers and Landcare groups to work with hundreds of landholders, many other community groups, and urban communities, and is the backbone of our success.

QMDC's strategic plan and the *Regional NRM Plan* continue to promote a strong guide for all our activities with our overall focus being the implementation of the accredited *Regional NRM Plan*.



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These activities include our ability to:

- improve working relationships with key regional organizations and industries
- to facilitate co-operation and collaboration between key stakeholders and the State Government within the region
- to support the Landcare movement to develop effective sub-catchment plans
- to ensure regional community views are reflected in policy development and planning instruments.

2.0 General feedback

QMDC commends the MDBA on producing a position paper on *localism*. The paper addresses many of the issues raised by QMDC in previous submissions on the Basin Plan and its Guide especially in reference to the need to align local, regional, state and national planning processes. Empowering communities in the QMDB region to sustainably manage their natural resources requires the successful ownership of the Basin Plan through robust community engagement process. This will achieve several outcomes including those sought by the paper, namely:

- A strong sense of community engagement in whatever the outcomes for the Basin Plan are;
- The development of a Plan that meets a wide range of community expectations;
- An opportunity to participate for a wide range of interests;
- Assurances that the Basin Plan initiative is being integrated with other regional, state and national NRM programs to maximise cost benefits; and
- Water reforms and better management through an improved coordinated delivery of science, policy, planning and legislation as a total package.

3.0 Comments on definition

QMDC recommends adding the following words (highlighted and underlined in red):

1. *The following is proposed as a **working definition of localism**: Localism in water management is about governments partnering with local and regional communities and organisations to manage water and other natural resources in an integrated way. Localism should help governments and communities share and improve their respective capacities to better deliver **outcomes from** water reforms. Localism emphasises:*

*(a) **community engagement to enhance ownership** the potentially greater community ownership and implementation of plans and programs which are collaboratively developed between communities and governments*

*(b) **utilising local knowledge in the development of solutions within a strategic framework** the potentially greater practicality, creativity and permanence of water management solutions generated by local and regional communities provided those solutions are consistent with a strategic framework which recognises up- and down-stream interests*



4.0 Comments on sections 1 (c) and (d)

QMDC supports the need for collaboration and integration across themes and between levels of government as per references in (c) and (d). However QMDC urges the commitment to integration within levels of government, for example, the need for MDBA, SEWPaC and CfoC program leaders to work together.

*(c) **collaborative implementation between local, regional, state and national interests** the potential to achieve greater improvements in water management by making best use of existing delivery capacity at all scales, and using governance arrangements that maintain and improve that capacity through time, and*

*(d) **adaptive management of water as part of the broader landscape** integrated management of natural resources is a long term, complex and adaptive task, particularly in populated and heavily modified landscapes like the Basin. If governments devolve some roles to existing local and regional structures, this strengthens their capacity to integrate water and related programs now and adaptively manage them in the future.*

5.0 Comments on section 2

QMDC recommends adding the following words (highlighted and underlined in red):

2. Local involvement in setting the rationale, options and methods for achieving desired outcomes from water reforms and other national, state and regional programs. It may also mobilise a broader range of government, industry and community resources to this task if it helps find practical ways for water management to jointly achieving environmental, economic and social outcomes

6.0 Comments on section 3

QMDC recommends deleting the MDBA 's opinion on what previous feedback has indicated and reword the introductory sentence in section 3 so that it shows a clear commitment to localism. QMDC also recommends amending section 3 (b) see amendments (highlighted and underlined in red):

3. **Localism can improve how:**

(a) initial Sustainable Diversion Limits are reviewed during the pathway to 2019 (Basin Plan)

(b) The Basin Plan and associated environmental watering plans are aligned with other natural resources plans

(c) water buyback programs as a last resort and on-farm irrigation efficiency programs are implemented (SEWPAC and states)

(d) social and economic impacts of water reform are monitored, assessed and ameliorated (Commonwealth and State agencies to assess and respond)

(e) actions taken to implement water plans at different levels are aligned on the ground (MDBA/Basin Plan/Regional).

4. Note that only some of the roles in paragraph 3 are MDBA roles, and localism is likely to be implemented in different ways depending on what is 'fit for purpose' in different



jurisdictions and for different issues. MDBA will work with agencies and communities to ensure different approaches to implementing localism in different aspects of water reform are compatible.

5. The following high level propositions express key aspects of localism as it is understood in relevant literature and natural resource management practice:
- (a) Localism should complement existing legislative arrangements
 - (b) Decisions must be made at appropriate scales from local to regional, State and Basin
 - (c) Localism should apply widely to promote collaborative action by many
 - (d) Localism should build on existing regional structures and enhance community capacity
 - (e) Localism requires appropriate governance and broad community legitimacy
 - (f) Localism should be based on adaptive governance
 - (g) Localism needs empowerment, resources and accountability
 - (h) Localism should be transparently informed by the best available knowledge and science
 - (i) Localism should be based on adaptive management.

7.0 Comments on section 6

QMDC recommends adding the following words (highlighted and underlined in red):

6. The following proposed **localism principles** attempt to translate that broader view of localism into something that the MDBA could implement:

- 1. seek to understand local perspectives and utilise local knowledge as all on ground action is taken at a local level
- 2. work through nominated state, regional and local engagement structures
- 3. walk the talk – for example act consistently with localism in how MDBA:
 - i. implements its roles and powers under the Water Act 2007
 - ii. directly engages people and communities as well as groups and governments in a two way process
 - iii. provides practical information to people and ground truths information against local knowledge –because quality information empowers
 - iv. decides what is monitored, measured, researched and reported on

8.0 Comments on section 7

QMDC recommends changing the section (b) to section (a) and vice versa and amending according to the following words (highlighted and underlined in red):

7. Possible actions the MDBA could work towards over time to implement localism might include:

- (a) Articulating MDBA's objectives in ways which allow local and regional groups to practically engage in developing proposals to meet those objectives more effectively and efficiently and/or at lower costs.



*(b) Prioritising MDBA's engagement and consultation on the draft Basin Plan **and associated environmental watering plans** through localism structures nominated by each jurisdiction, and transparently respond to their issues in a report accompanying the final Basin Plan.*

(c) Agreeing with jurisdictions how proposals to amend SDLs will be developed through and in consultation with regional and state structures.

(d) Determining how the MDBA's approach to localism is reflected in the MDBA's:

(i) refinement of environmental objectives in the period to 2015

(ii) guidelines and criteria for amending SDLs

(iii) expectations for state water resource plans

(iv) monitoring and evaluation requirements

(e) Reflecting the MDBA's approach to localism in how the MDBA reports on (d) (i) to (iv) above.

(f) Working with state, regional and local groups as appropriate in defining the MDBA's forward science and research needs.

9.0 Comments on sections 8 & 9

QMDC agrees with the opinions articulated in sections 8 & 9, namely that the successful adoption of localism requires alignment of planning and delivery at appropriate scales and regional NRM organisations are a good starting point (if resourced appropriately) to facilitate collaboration, alignment and coordination of associated planning instruments.

QMDC already has structures, staff and capacity in the region and should be a key organisation to negotiate MDBA programme delivery in the Queensland section of the Murray Darling Basin.

*8. Localism will be more successful if adopted as a way for Commonwealth and state programs to be aligned at appropriate local, regional, Basin, state or national scales **and delivered by local/regional structures**.*

9. A good place to start implementing localism may be how Governments partner with regional natural resource management organisations to align and coordinate the implementation of environmental watering plans and regional resource management plans.