Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2015

Submission

QMDC Comments on the Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2015

18 December 2015

Submission to:

Research Director
Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane Qld 4000
ipnrc@parliament.qld.gov.au

Submitting organisation:

Chief Executive Officer
Queensland Murray-Darling Committee Inc.
PO Box 6243
Toowoomba QLD 4350
Phone: 07 4637 6276
Fax: 07 4632 8062
geoffp@qmdc.org.au

These comments are 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 resources.

1.0   Background

QMDC has made numerous submissions and deputations to both the Australian and Queensland Governments seeking improvement to legislation, policies, and planning to both, prevent or manage impacts on the water resources in the catchments of the QMDB. These submissions and deputations have raised issues integral to regional governance, community engagement, water use efficiency, water resource planning, the protection of watercourses and aquatic ecosystems, CSG water management, and floodplain management.

2.0   General comments

QMDC posits that our on-going work within the diverse catchments of the QMDB has allowed QMDC to access not only valuable scientific and technical information; but also the local knowledge and experience of the QMDB's rural and regional communities, including local businesses and industry on water management issues at a regional and state-wide level. We support the amendments of this Bill which proposes to implement important water management mechanisms QMDC has repeatedly raised with regards to the overall delivery of water management strategies in the QMDB.

3.0   Specific comments

3.1   QMDC supports the inclusion of the principles of ecologically sustainable development (ESD) in the purpose of the Water Act 2000. However in order to provide teeth to ESD, the Act must require a commitment to an objective monitoring program that will build on past work to monitor condition and trend of species, landscapes, production systems and communities.

3.2   QMDC supports the omission of provisions that allow for designated watercourses.

3.3   QMDC recognises the role executive powers can play in administering river improvement trust duties and obligations. These powers however should be fettered and accountable. To ensure these powers are not a source of contention, management of river and aquatic ecosystem health should clearly be informed by current science and technical information, local knowledge and cultural values especially with regards to floodplain functioning and cultural heritage. Provisions relating to the establishment and membership of river improvement trusts, and the powers and obligations of these trusts in relation to the undertaking and maintenance of works should be governed by appropriate skilled and trusted persons empowering state government and local communities to be custodians exercising efficient and transparent decision and management processes.

3.4   QMDC supports the amendments to ensure new provisions of the Water Act will operate effectively. We assert further amendments are needed to ensure existing water planning instruments and processes are appropriately transitioned into a water planning framework based on ESD. QMDC is concerned that the existing water planning framework promoted by the Act allows mining interests to prevail. QMDC continues to argue that the inherent right to water given to mining companies and permitted by the Water Act should be revoked as part of the proposed amendments. CISRO and BOM climate change projections clearly highlight the likelihood of drier climates in parts of Queensland where availability and access to water will become an even greater and urgent social justice matter.