



**SEWCDB 05/14
EO2014/032**

Hon Ian Hunter MP
Minister for Sustainability, Environment and Conservation
GPO Box 645
ADELAIDE SA 5001

Dear Minister

The South Eastern Water Conservation and Drainage Board (the Board) notes the Premier's letter dated 8 July 2014 inviting boards to have input into his decision to reform South Australian Government boards and committees.

I am pleased to advise that the Board at its meeting held 14 August 2014 formally considered the Premier's review of boards and committees with the view of making a submission to you as part of the review process.

The Board sees that it has a valuable role in assisting Government to manage and conserve drainage and surface water in the South East of the State and offers suggestions on how it can continue to operate.

The Board is made up of eight members, four appointed by the Governor, three elected landholder representatives and one appointed by the Local Government Association of South Australia.

The strengths that the Board brings to this role include the strong connection members have with the community and stakeholders, local environment and drainage systems. The three landholder representatives bring specific knowledge of management in an agricultural context.

The Board has confirmed its current priority functions as:

- Planning for and managing the decision support systems and infrastructure that minimise the damage to agricultural land and the environment caused by flooding in the region.
- Providing direction to ensure that there is a balance between drainage and conservation
- Liaising with stakeholders and providing a link between the stakeholders and government
- Empowering community involvement to broker solutions

- Approval of licensing for private drainage works to ensure that it is in line with policy
- Leveraging additional funds (alternative to state government) to increase capacity in managing and maintaining the drainage network
- Providing local expertise to government in relation to drainage and conservation
- Increasing efficiencies and reducing duplication by collaborating with government and stakeholders

In addition to these functions the Board has identified a number of future priorities:

- Ensure groundwater levels adequately sustain appropriate agricultural and environmental outcomes
- Maximise opportunities for research and development that will ensure adequate monitoring to underpin decision making
- Building the capacity of the community to be environmental stewards
- Provision of expertise to future projects that impact on the conservation and management of water through drainage systems

The Board recognises that to meet Government expectations there is a number of improvements that could be made. These include building the knowledge and capacity of the community to understand and appreciate the role of the drainage system in the South East, and undertaking a planned approach to ensure that there is efficiencies made in operating the increased drainage network since the expiration of *the Upper South East Dryland Salinity and Flood Management Act 2002*.

The Board believes that it operates in a way that is cost effective (total annual cost for Board operation is \$40,000). Board members volunteer many hours and resources in support of their culture of "lean" operation. The expertise it provides would be difficult for the Government to access at the same cost. The Board wishes to retain its Finance and Governance Committee but believes that efficiencies could be gained by the abolition of the Eight Mile Creek Water Conservation and Drainage Advisory Committee.

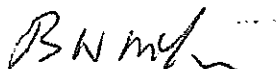
As a Statutory authority the Board is of the view that it needs to maintain a level of separation from Government in order to undertake the following functions:

- Independent liaison with community and stakeholders
- Leverage of funding not available to Government
- Maintain knowledge and expertise through changes of government
- Independent Board members are able to build a level of trust with the community that is not always achieved by government authorities.
- An independent Board is able to influence and bring community views to Government to achieve mutually acceptable outcomes

The Board is committed to working closely with Government to achieve the expectations of the community in increasing transparency and enabling collaboration in the development of public policy.

In considering the Premier's reform I ask you to support the retention of the South Eastern Water Conservation and Drainage Board as an integral part of how government cooperates with the community and achieves outcomes into the future.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Brett McLaren', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Brett McLaren

Acting Chair

South Eastern Water Conservation and Drainage Board

14 August 2014

