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11 August 2014

The Hon Ian Hunter MLC
 Minister for Sustainability, Environment and Conservation
 GPO Box 1047
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Dear Minister Hunter,

Connecting communities and building trust and credibility

Thank you for your letters dated Friday 1 August 2014 to each of the four Chairs of Natural Resources Management (NRM) Groups in the South Australian Murray-Darling Basin (SAMDB) regarding the review of Government Boards and Committees.

The SAMDB NRM Board and its NRM Groups have considered your request for a response in relation to retaining NRM Groups, and would like to advise you that we collectively agree that the NRM Board and our NRM Groups (listed below) play an important role on behalf of government, community and industry, and should be retained.

- Mallee and Coorong – east of the River and recognised for its dryland farming (cereals and grazing) and large conservation areas such as Ngarkat Conservation Park
- Rangelands – includes the pastoral country north of the river and hilly grazing and cropping land of the northern part of the Eastern Mount Lofty Ranges
- Ranges to River – a highly populated sub-region between the spine of the Eastern Mount Lofty Ranges and River Murray with a diverse range of intensive and dryland farming land uses
- Riverland – From the border to Blanchetown, this sub-region is characterised by its irrigated agriculture adjacent the River Murray and the large Bookmark Mallee conservation area

Our four NRM Groups have been established by the SAMDB NRM Board under the *Natural Resources Management Act (SA) 2004*. They each comprise seven community members who work with and motivate the local community and industries to engage in NRM, and we maintain a close relationship with the SAMDB NRM Board, local government and government staff.

Your letter refers to “Efficiency” and “Independence” as important principles for decisions on which Boards and committees should be retained, and we provide the following information for your consideration under those headings:

Efficiency

- We are already connected – NRM groups are great implementers of the Government’s “Better Together Framework”. We know who to engage and have a local presence and direct link to local volunteers, community groups, local government and industry, and support community involvement in Government initiatives and decision-making in a cost-effective way. This also provides stability for the local community as departmental project and research staff, and private providers change continuously. We are also able to facilitate an integrated approach to NRM and socio-economic issues because we connect different parts of the community to bring about a shared vision for our future;
- We are volunteers – NRM Group membership is entirely community based and the cost of supporting members (who contribute their skills, knowledge and experience) is minimal given we undertake a significant amount of work outside of meetings - championing NRM, developing connections, strengthening networks and assisting in the development of partnerships. This work would be extremely difficult to replicate with paid staff due to the respect and trust that the community already have in NRM group members, and would place further demand on the resources of your agency.

Independence

- We link government to the community - as members of the local community we connect the “Grass Roots of NRM” to government by listening and communicating both ways. In this way, we connect government priority to landholder priority which helps to realize the Premier’s vision of “premium food and wine from a clean environment”;
- We build trust and credibility – members are local leaders and are considered independent and objective. We are not insulated from the economic or social issues that communities face, and are considered “real people that real people can trust” in the interaction between the public and DEWNR.

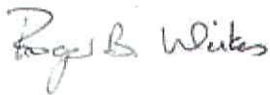
Our NRM Groups also play an important role in supporting and delivering on-ground projects that are priorities in the community developed regional NRM plan, and facilitating community discussion on local NRM issues. This has recently included (amongst many other things) community discussion on water management issues in the dairy sector, development of a landscape approach to Pike River management, the impact on commercial fisheries and bird-life from New Zealand Fur Seals on the Lower Murray/Coorong, a landscape approach to goat and rabbit control impacting agriculture in the Burra to Olary Ranges region, and working with partners and interstate neighbours on the management of the international scale Bookmark Biosphere. We have also provided extensive support to bushfire affected landholders and developed a water monitoring program for the Rangelands.

We believe that retaining the NRM Groups in the SAMDB NRM Region is a real opportunity to continue to strengthen our connection to community and government, and increase ‘community ownership and action’ in NRM. Importantly for our region, there is a growing respect for the SAMDB NRM Board and the NRM Groups amongst our community, industries and local government. Our NRM model of a Board and four NRM Groups is working well and is appropriate for the large area

and diverse landscapes and social and economic make-up of our region, and reflects the extensive negotiations had with the community when the *Natural Resources Management Act (SA) 2004* was developed.

We are pleased to provide comment on the future of our Groups as part of the Government Boards and Committee Reform process, and would be pleased to discuss our comments with you further or answer any questions you may have.

Yours sincerely



Roger Wickes
Chair, Mallee and Coorong NRM Group



Ms Jo Gebhardt
Chair, Rangelands NRM Group



Ms Monique White
Chair, Ranges to River NRM Group



Mr Ken Stokes
Chair, Riverland NRM Group

