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

### **Achieving State Priorities and Inspiring Communities into Action**

Strongly advancing State government priorities and innovatively involving community in decision-making is a hallmark of the South Australian Murray-Darling Basin Natural Resources Management Board (the Board).

Thank you for your letter dated Friday 1 August 2014 regarding the review of Government Boards and Committees, and your request for advice on retaining the Board.

The Board supports the intent of the review. It also wishes to advise you that it believes it undertakes a very important role on behalf of government and should be retained. Natural Resources Management (NRM) Boards achieve State priorities and inspire communities into action, and continue to connect deeply and effectively to the region's citizens to achieve NRM. There is a growing respect for our work as leaders and mentors in the South Australian Murray-Darling Basin (SAMDB) region, and their retention is a real opportunity to continue to strengthen the connection and broker solutions with our regional community, industry and all tiers of government.

### **Achieving Government Priorities**

- The work of the SAMDB NRM Board supports and enables the State Government to achieve key elements of its *Seven Strategic Priorities*, particularly "*premium food and wine from a clean environment*" which includes the need for clean water, clean air and clean soil (all strongly supported by the work of Regional NRM Boards). We also support the "*Safe communities, healthy neighbourhoods*" priority which promotes green neighbourhoods and encourages more people spending more time outdoors. The work of the Board is also underpinned by the *State NRM Plan 2012-2017 (Our Place Our Future)*.

### **We are connected**

- Connecting government priority and landholder priority is an important and successful function of Regional NRM Boards and their sub-regional NRM Groups. As members of the local community we connect the "*Grass Roots of NRM*" to government by listening and communicating in both directions. We understand the citizens of our region, know them and

are more able to broker change with them. We utilize modern methods of engagement and co-design, and have a local presence which is a cost-effective way of supporting *all* of the community to be involved in Government initiatives (diverse engagement approaches). For example, the Board recently endorsed utilising a "Citizens Jury" or similar approach to engaging the local community of the Pike River in the Riverland on the issue of water sharing and salinity.

- Our Board's community members and our NRM Group members are also local leaders and considered independent and objective in their interaction between the public and DEWNR, and are not insulated from the economic or social issues that local communities face. In this way, we build trust and, through long association, are able to connect to people in our region much more easily than government employed staff.

#### **NRM: Economic Gain**

- The management of our natural resources is critical for the ongoing wealth and economy of South Australia and the SAMDB NRM Region. It underpins agriculture, food production and tourism which are critical to our region's current and future economy. For example, our region attracts over one million visitors annually, of which 10 per cent participate in water related or nature based activities. Agriculture is the dominant employment industry (14 per cent) with the economy driven by primary production (\$2.2B, focussing in the areas of fruit, milk, vegetable, meat and grain production and processing) (*Regional Roadmap 2013-16*).
- Regional NRM Boards are also the only conduit for Australian Government regional delivery funding, and most funding is directed to community, industry and landscapes through Boards. The SAMDB NRM Board, for example, was recipient to over \$23m and \$18m of Australian Government funding in 2013-14 and 2012-13 respectively. This funding is leveraged by the NRM levy and would not be accessible without regional NRM bodies. It would be a significant disadvantage to the state without these additional resources.

#### **Modern Community Engagement**

- Regional NRM Boards have also proven their ability to activate and mobilise people, and have a reputation for excellence in engagement of regional communities. We lead the state in the use of the Government's "Better Together Framework" and connect with citizens in a wide variety of ways, including direct support of local community and industry groups, and using modern community involvement and decision-making tools (e.g. IAP2 philosophy), co-design and social media (e.g. Facebook and Have Your Say websites). These approaches have shaped the development and delivery of the regional NRM plan (e.g. attracting over 600 responses to the "Connection to Country" values on-line and workshop survey) and fostered collaborative problem solving and policy development (e.g. Water Allocation Plans).
- Our Results (2013-14): 417 farmers involved in land management events; 1,900 volunteers; 72 schools involved in NRM education; 144 irrigators supported to improve irrigation; 95 community groups; 500 landholders involved in habitat restoration; 79,000 goats removed.

#### **Building Partnerships with multiple sectors**

- An effective partnership with regional communities, industries and government is critical to define and share NRM opportunities and threats, and together act on them. For this reason the SAMDB NRM Board invests strongly in developing partnerships, and has a proven record in working with all levels of government, industry and the private sector to broker solutions to complex issues for economic, environmental and social outcomes. For example, in Water

Allocation Planning the Board works with industry, irrigators and other water users to develop solutions to long term sustainability and sharing of the resource. The result is certainty for businesses and business investment in the short and longer term.

- Regional NRM Boards also have the ability to broker partnerships so that limited funding can achieve greater outcomes (e.g. Strengthening Basin Communities project where the Board worked with Local Governments to achieve significantly better outcomes for water reuse and security than could be achieved if any one organisation was to “go it alone”). Significant further investment has followed.
- Regional NRM Boards have also taken a lead role in involving Aboriginal communities in NRM, which is a natural partnership given the connection of traditional owners to Country. Employment pathways into the NRM sector (public and private) are opening up through programs such as the Board’s Aboriginal Learning on Country (ALOC) in the SAMDB NRM Region, and more than 20 Aboriginal people have been given employment and education opportunities through our ALOC program.
- There is opportunity to strengthen partnerships with other government agencies working across the NRM portfolio to ensure that we all work in an integrated way and avoid duplication and conflicting approaches.

#### **NRM Groups - a pivotal link to local communities**

- Our four NRM Groups (Mallee and Coorong; Rangelands; Ranges to River; and Riverland) are great implementers of the Government’s “Better Together Framework”. They 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. They are also able to facilitate an integrated approach to NRM and socio-economic issues because they connect different parts of the community to bring about a shared vision for our future.
- NRM Groups are also a cost-effective way of engaging local communities. Their membership is entirely community based, and members willingly contribute their skills, knowledge and experience, and 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.

#### **Sub-committees helping to streamline Board business**

- The Board is also strongly supported by a number of sub-committees that streamline and create greater accountability for its business, and on that basis should be retained. By creating efficiencies in time and resources, these committees allow the Board to focus their effort on discussion and decision-making on strategic matters.
  - Financial Governance Committee
  - Executive Committee
  - Community at the Centre Collective
  - Grant Assessment and Review Panel
  - River Murray Advisory Committee
  - Three Local Government NRM Advisory Committees
- The Board would also like to take this opportunity to advocate the continuation of the following committees that are important for NRM and community engagement in our region:
  - Border Groundwater Review Committee

- Kungun Ngarrindjeri Yunnan Agreement (KNYA) Taskforce
- First Peoples of the River Murray and Mallee Region Indigenous Land Use Agreement (ILUA) Liaison Committee
- Pike Implementation Program Reference Committee
- Ngaut Ngaut Management Board (to be established)

As part of its review process, the Board has also identified the following committees that can be abolished because their function is either no longer required or could be undertaken by more efficient and cost-effective means:

- Box Flat Dingo Committee
- NRM Group Chairs Forum
- Mallee Water Allocation Plan Advisory Committee
- Eastern Mount Lofty Ranges Water Allocation Plan Advisory Committees (x2)
- Branched Broomrape Advisory Committee

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on the future of NRM Boards as part of the Government Boards and Committee Reform process. I would be pleased to discuss our comments with you further and look forward to hearing from you about the results of the review.

Yours sincerely



Sharon Starick  
Presiding Member  
**South Australian Murray-Darling Basin Natural Resources Management Board**