

25 AUG 2014

MIN. BIGNELL

The Hon Leon Bignell MP
Minister for Agriculture, Food and Fisheries
GPO Box 1671
Adelaide SA 5001

~~21~~ August 2014

Dear Minister Bignell,

I am writing in response to correspondence I recently received from the Premier, Jay Weatherill, outlining his decision to reform South Australian government boards and committees.

As Chair of the South Australian River Murray Sustainability Program (SARMS) Steering Committee I welcome the opportunity to provide input into the reform process and provide my feedback to you as the Minister responsible for the National Partnership Agreement (NPA) on SARMS.

As you would be aware, the \$265 million SARMS is fully funded by the Australian Government and is delivered by the Department of Primary Industries and Regions SA (PIRSA) on behalf of the South Australian Government. In delivering a Program of the scale and complexity of SARMS, it is imperative that efficient and effective governance is in place.

As such, the NPA on SARMS states there must be ... *establishment and implementation of fair, transparent and competitive processes for the distribution of any funding with robust governance arrangements and appeals processes*. Maintaining the agreed governance arrangements and the associated level of independence and probity is therefore critical to meeting the State's requirements under the NPA. Accordingly, the Program's governance model was agreed with Australian Government officers and approved by the then Minister for Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, the Hon Gail Gago MLC, in November 2013.

The Steering Committee is to receive direct reports from the SARMS Expert Assessment Panel and Community and Industry Engagement Reference Group, and provide independent advice to the Program on management, strategic and policy matters, including final recommendations for funding under the various SARMS grant funds.

Recent achievements of the Steering Committee include:

- oversight of the assessment of 213 Expressions of Interest in Round One of the \$240 million Irrigation Industry Improvement Program (3IP), and

- provision of recommendations to you on the final funding package for Round One of the 3IP, resulted in the approval of 99 projects valued at over \$100 million and returning over 20 gigalitres of water to water recovery targets under the Murray Darling Basin Plan.

The Steering Committee will soon be overseeing the assessment of applications to the \$5 million Industry-led Research Sub-program and \$12.5 million Regional Development and Innovation Fund, as well as the \$7.5 million redevelopment of the Loxton Research Centre.

A change to the governance model at this midpoint in Program delivery may disrupt its successful implementation and undermine positive relationships with the irrigation community who were fundamental in designing the original Program business case.

In light of the above, I request that you recommend to the Premier that the SARMS Program Steering Committee be recognised as a critical committee for the implementation of this significant \$265 million program and that it should operate as agreed with the Australian Government.

I am happy to discuss this matter with you if you wish and look forward to continuing to work with you in my capacity as Chair of the SARMS Program Steering Committee.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rob Kerin". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small flourish at the end.

Rob Kerin