

Briefing Paper

Commonwealth Environmental Water:

Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Improvement Framework May 2012

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Introduction

This Briefing Note is a critical summary of the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder (CEWH) "*Commonwealth Environmental Water: Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Improvement Framework May 2012*" report. This report outlines the revised framework for the monitoring, evaluating, reporting and improvement (MERI) of the CEWH. It is intended to support the efficient and effective use of Commonwealth Environmental Water and to demonstrate the achievement of environmental objectives.

The full report is available under;

<http://www.environment.gov.au/ewater/publications/pubs/meri-framework.pdf>

Stakeholder submissions to the initial report can be found under the following link;

<http://www.environment.gov.au/ewater/evaluation/stakeholder-response.html>

Executive Summary

- The report still does not provide specific details on how monitoring, evaluation and reporting will be conducted by the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder.
- Three additional principles were included in the MERI framework.
- Stakeholder concerns from the draft report were not adequately addressed in the updated framework.

Outline and Language of Report

The document is kept in a high level language providing only guidance for the development and implantation of the MERI framework. It is noted, that the report is not intended to provide details on particular MERI activities which would be the subject of more detailed scoping work.

The MERI framework will be implemented to align with three levels of planning;

- Basin Plan,
- Long Term Portfolio Management Strategy, and
- Annual Water Use Options

It will also include three levels of monitoring;

- Operational,
- Intervention and,
- Program level.

MERI Principles

The initial 6 principle underlying the MERI framework have been extended by three;

7. Monitoring, evaluation and reporting activities for the use of CEW will complement , not duplicate or replace existing and planned activities
8. Monitoring, evaluation and reporting programs will be based on shared responsibility with partners in areas of common interest. (underlining added)

The relevant abstract;

"Like the delivery of commonwealth environmental water itself, operational level monitoring is generally best implemented by local delivery partners. Whether these be local groups or state agencies, they will be well placed to undertake operational monitoring to adaptively manage watering actions." (p17)

9. Consistent MERI systems will be adopted in the management of Commonwealth environmental water and progress towards consistent and comparable monitoring, evaluation and reporting across the Murray Darling basin will be encouraged and supported.

NSWIC response;

- Principle 7 should be regarded as positive as it implies that less resources are wasted for unnecessary additional reporting.
- Principle 8 could be a concern for Members, as it might necessitate further work and financial resource commitments by individual members.
- Principle 9 should be welcomed as long as a consistent MERI framework will still take into consideration valley specific characteristics.

Additional Concerns

Several concerns were raised to the initial draft document however most arguments have been inadequately addressed in the revised framework. Following are three aspects of particular concern;

- Concerns were raised about lack of socio economic consideration in the MERI framework to which the response was of the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder was;

The focus of this MERI framework is ecological response to the use of CEW. We recognise the need for monitoring and evaluation to address socio - economic matters relating to Basin Plan reforms. These matters are being addressed by the Murray Darling basin Authority under Section 12 of the proposed Basin Plan.(p2 appendix)

NSWIC response;

Given the lack of detail in the socio economic work underlying the proposed Basin Plan, NSWIC is not convinced that the Proposed Basin Plan provides a sufficient basis to address socio economic issues.

- Submissions raised concerns about cost sharing arrangements to which the response was;

Commonwealth Environmental Water recognise the need to work effectively with others in implementing MERI and seeks that costs of these activities be shared in a manner that reflects the cost responsibilities of jurisdictions, as well as the distribution of benefits that results from Commonwealth environmental watering and associated MERI activities.(p.4 appendix)

NSWIC response;

NSWIC is concerned that shared cost responsibilities will plainly mean additional contributions - time and financial resources - from Members. As the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder does not intend to monitor all environmental sites, it is questionable how the shared cost components will be determined.

- Submissions raised concerns about indicator sites to which the response was;

It is not practical or cost effective to undertake detailed monitoring everywhere, so it is proposed to focus intensive intervention monitoring at selected areas. (p.4 appendix)

NSWIC response;

If the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder does not intend to monitor all environmental sites regularly, NSWIC questions how the ecological health of each site will be assessed and how an adaptive improvement framework can be put in place that is ultimately based on reports on outcomes.

Conclusion

The Commonwealth Environmental Water: Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Improvement Framework document is not very detailed in its current form. It should be remembered that any changes to the proposed Basin Plan could change the structure and principles of the MERI and as such the report should be considered a work in progress.