



To Whom it May Concern

**Response to Draft Guidelines for the Murray-Darling Healthy Rivers Program – Large Grants Stream**

1. The Department is to be congratulated on developing a program which both aims to deliver improved river healthy outcomes and the engagement of the community in the restoration of river health.
2. The development of useful ecosystem restoration projects is one that takes some time with a variety of issues to be overcome. The most important is the interest and capacity of the community to undertake river health projects. This has been at a low base for a long time and there are many river reaches, or indeed entire rivers, with no active individual champions or groups prepared to invest time, money and effort to the painstaking tasks required. This project presents a fantastic opportunity to build this capacity with learning by doing.
3. Another essential issue related to work in and around aquatic ecosystems is weather. Both droughts and floods regularly delay aquatic habitat restoration projects and trying to deliver projects, particularly riparian restoration, in 12 months increases the likelihood of failure.
4. While this funding is available and important there are also many other opportunities to value add to the works being proposed with additional funding from corporations and other entities. We are currently undertaking a project with funding from the NSW Recreational Fishing Trust in partnership with Landcare NSW. In this project we were able to use \$160,000 to attract an additional \$341,000 in the first 12 months in the knowledge that funding would be available in future years so was worthy of time investment by other partners.

**Recommendation: That the Program be extended to a 3-year program**

5. The success of the Landcare program across Australia has occurred with funded Landcare Facilitator and Coordinator positions nationwide. These positions support Landcare volunteers by helping with technical aspects of project planning, building and engaging volunteer Landcare groups and reporting outcomes. There are no such positions across the Basin with the interest skills and experience to build and engage communities in *river health* activities except a small number created through our corporate funding. For this project to succeed the Program should support coordination of community engagement activities.

**Recommendation: That the Program support community engagement, which is essential to its success, and it is recognised in the supported activities.**

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6. Unlike Landcare projects which occur predominately on private land this program is intended to deliver projects in rivers and wetlands. In most instances these works will occur on Crown Land and require a number of Permits and Approvals. For instance, a recent river habitat resnagging project in the Murrumbidgee River required 3 key approvals/permits which took over 10 months to achieve. These are time consuming, adding increased need to the extension of the program, but also costly (because of the time involved) as such we, and I suspect any other groups will not have developed projects that are “shovel ready”.

**Recommendation: That the Program not require projects to be “Shovel Ready” with the focus on this part of the application assessment on proven ability to deliver works on the ground.**

7. The limitation on total funding for the Large Grants Program is a problem if the Program is looking for efficiencies that can be achieved by doing similar work across the Basin. With Basin scale activity and for an increased number of years an increase in total allowable grants should yield improved value for money and attract greater investment from other funders and the community.

**Recommendation: That the Program increase total possible grants to \$5,000,000.**

If you have any questions on the issues raised in this submission please contact me on [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely,



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Chief Executive Officer

14 January, 2021

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