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To the review Panel

I support the objectives of the Act, that protecting and restoring ecological values and ecosystem services is essential to supporting the economy and the communities of the Murray-Darling Basin, that the Act and the Basin Plan need to be given adequate time to be fully tested, and that the role of the CEWH should be affirmed and strengthened.

The Commonwealth Water Act, which came into operation in 2008, is ground-breaking environmental legislation. For the first time it put environmental protection at the centre of water management in the Murray-Darling Basin, and a key objective is that water should be managed in the national interest, not state or partisan interests.

The Act sets up the Murray-Darling Basin Plan, the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder (CEWH) and much else beside. Its objectives include:

- managing the water resources of the Murray-Darling Basin (MDB) in the national interest;
- ensuring the return of water extraction to environmentally sustainable levels,
- protecting, restoring and providing for the ecological values and ecosystem services of the MDB
- giving effect to international agreements (such as the Ramsar Convention on wetlands); and
- managing water resources in a way that optimises economic, social and environmental outcomes.

At the time the Act was passed, the Basin Plan was expected to be in full operation by 2014, so a review is mandated for this year. As it worked out, the Basin Plan was not finalised until the end of 2012 and the full amount of water is not due to be returned to rivers until 2019, so it's a little early to be reviewing how well it is meeting its objectives. Likewise the Act itself needs more time to see how well the complex arrangements between the Commonwealth and the states are working, whether it is benefitting the environment, and to allow the CEWH to fully develop its role in managing environmental water.

These strong environmental objectives should remain at its heart

Regards Nick Ivanoff