Indigenous Water Management in the Murray-Darling Basin: Priorities for the Next Five Years

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Background

• MDBA obligated to assess social and economic impacts of the Basin Plan under *Water Act 2007*

• to ‘have regard for’ social, cultural, Indigenous issues

• Jan 2010 MDBA contracted CSIRO to conduct a scoping study of effects of changes in water availability (*Jackson, Moggridge and Robinson 2010*)
Indigenous context

- 70,000 people in 2006, ~3.5% of total MDB
- 15% of national Indigenous population
- Growing rapidly
- Much younger age profile
- Higher levels of disadvantage
- Less often employed in two major industries (agriculture and retailing)
Indigenous water management

- Indigenous people have distinct perspectives on water and diverse and interdependent interests

- But, these are not well understood:
  - Severe lack of quantitative data on Indigenous water uses and values of the Basin
  - Constrains the measurement of impacts

Nari Nari wetland watered using licenced water, Hay.
Indigenous water management

• There are many barriers to accessing water and participating in water management, esp. environmental water management

• Indigenous people are developing policy ideas and keen to participate in restoring the health of the MDB

• The Basin Plan offers many potential opportunities
  • To be involved in environmental water mgmt
  • To contribute knowledge
  • To develop secure livelihoods from NRM.
Indigenous water management

• Need to put more effort into identifying and meeting Indigenous water requirements in water resource plans

• Environmental water management needs to be more inclusive of Indigenous uses, values and priorities
  • Assessment techniques
  • Evaluation of costs and benefits
  • Governance models to support Indigenous management
  • Capacity building

• Indigenous groups need support to contribute to local plans

• And impacts need to be monitored.
Summary

• Basin Plan represents a significant opportunity to address neglected area

• But, there are substantial knowledge gaps

• Research is needed to influence the next Plan

• In the short term, focus should be on adapting and reforming water resource planning to meet Indigenous water requirements

• Also need more policy discussion between Indigenous people, all levels of government, researchers and other stakeholders.
Water for a Healthy Country
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