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Tuesday 19 April 2022

Submission Re: Regional Strengths and Infrastructure Gaps.

The above submission has been written on behalf of the Central West Environment Council (CWEC). Our organisation is an umbrella group consisting of 12 environmental groups located in the Central West. One of our concerns, and an issue for which all our groups are advocates, is that of the environmental impacts of infrastructure development on our rivers, lakes, and streams. It is with this advocacy in mind that we take the opportunity to respond to the recently released 2022 Regional Strengths and Infrastructure Gaps Report (March 17, 2022.)

In giving feedback to this report, we would like to comment on the bias that was evident in the fact that the RDA network was used to supply participants in the workshops. A quick perusal of the RDA website has little reference to any environmental issues, aims or objectives. As a result, there is evidence of bias toward production and water security towards irrigation and agricultural production, with little or no concern included for the riverine environment. Any reference to sustainable development and intergenerational equity is absent from the report. It is a well-known fact that both above and below ground water resources have been over-allocated and over-extracted, yet there is no reference to this.

One proposal that has been debated for some time is that of the raising of the Wyangala Dam wall. CWEC is most concerned about this proposal because of the devastating environmental impact it will have downstream. Raising of the wall will severely impact on downstream wetlands and the general riverine health of the Lachlan River system.

There are sustainable water management options available that will protect the environment as well as contribute to sustainable extraction. One such management strategy is the replacement of leaking pipes, saving an estimated 25 GL of water, which can be achieved at a much cheaper cost than that of the raising the dam wall. Successful implementation of this strategy will not be at the cost of damage to affected landholders, Aboriginal cultural heritage, or the health of downstream wetlands.

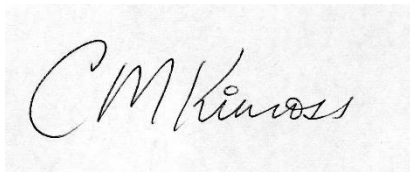
Towns in the Lachlan River region have been very generously allocated water for domestic use. Domestic demand by these towns and villages could be better managed to save water, thereby making it possible to reduce current water allocation to these communities. Strategies such as urban water recycling, stormwater harvesting and supply of rainwater tanks to

residents are ways of sustainably managing water that are commonplace in many towns and communities in Australia, which as we all know is the world's hottest and driest continent and requires such measures.

The Central West is constantly the focus of plans to expand agriculture, industry, and mining. Like this report, the impact of policies and projects relating to growth in this region pay scant attention to sustainability, and the effect of such growth on the environment and ecology of the region. This is particularly so with mining, which requires large amounts of water to operate. Any growth in agriculture, mining or industry must not proceed without plans to manage water use through improved efficiency and a detailed plan as to how environmental impacts are to be managed. It must be emphasised that the creation of new or bigger dams is not a solution that meets environmental needs, but is just a way to allocate water to preferred users. If this process is encouraged, it is inevitable that the environment will suffer.

ECCO thanks Infrastructure Australia for the opportunity to comment on the 2022 Regional Strengths and Infrastructure Gaps. We also thank you for the opportunity to advocate for alternatives to raising the wall at Wyangala. We must, for the sake of the Lachlan region and for the future of our country, implement water management strategies that are sustainable and are considerate of subsequent environmental impacts. These objectives cannot be met by new and bigger dams.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light-colored background. The signature is written in a cursive style and reads "Cilla Kinross".

Cilla Kinross,
President, Central West Environment Council