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DRAFT Evaluation framework for the review of water sharing plans under Section 43A of the Water Management Act 2000

I welcome the opportunity to comment on the draft NRC Evaluation Framework document for review of water sharing plans in accordance with the NSW Water Management Act.

In my view the section 43A provision was a far sighted and commendable requirement, which has resulted in some much needed and very useful appraisals.

The draft document on exhibition is clear and helpful in setting out the both the context and the processes followed. This clarity is particularly appreciated given the complexities and obscurities in water management issues. I also appreciated the inclusion of a webinar briefing through the DEP Water information series - despite the unfortunate technical hiccoughs on the day.

I welcome the clear articulation of obligation to review and evaluate compliance with the objects of the NSW Water Management Act.

Over the years I have been deeply concerned by vested interest pressure on decision makers elevating economic and social considerations above the farsighted legislated precedence of environmental considerations. The health of communities and their economies are dependent on the health of our natural water resources so that sustaining the environmental health of water resources must remain a priority consideration. Accordingly, I would urge the Commission to strengthen its evaluation of water sharing plans and water strategies with respect to delivering sustainable outcomes for the long term. I suggest that where any recommendations and advices arising from evaluations are not taken up the relevant water management decision makers should be required to provide clear rationale for their decision.

I trust the Commission will continue to be supported and resourced in its work with respect to water management, and will be heeded in terms of its comments on water planning, implementation and strategy development.

These brief comments are based on many years of involvement in water management issues, including as a former member of the Water Advisory Committee; several Water Sharing Plan Committees; and the Macquarie Regulated River Environmental Flows Reference (EWAG) Group.

