

Draft Note on the Emerging Challenges for the MRC Secretariat

Working draft for discussion, by Don Blackmore, Independent POE

The Note

Over the last 10 years the Secretariat has largely focused on capacity building, knowledge generation and getting started on some aspects of the Agreement. This Journey has largely been driven in the context of data, models, capacity building and long and protracted discussion on the Water Utilisation clauses of the agreement.

This is now changing rapidly with the Secretariat placing before countries a well structured set of information in the form of BDP2 that forces them to engage in a discussion and then a negotiation about “real” tradeoffs between countries and sectors.

The Secretariat now needs to be structured to act as the “honest broker”. That is the people who the countries can rely on to provide fair and even handed advice on the technical aspects no matter how difficult that may be as the information confronts the long held views and perceptions of participants. The process also encourages them to consider decisions that could result in real tradeoffs’ between Countries.

All successful River Basin Organisations confronted with these issues focus on how the role of “honest broker” will be executed by their organisation and ensures that it is structured to support it.

This will include;

- Well developed knowledge available to each country
- Assessment that clearly shows the tradeoffs between alternatives and the costs
- An engagement strategy that is tailored to the needs of individual countries
- The engagement strategy must deal with the community, technical and political decision makes.
- Ability to provide confidential advice to each country which discuss with them the issues from their viewpoint and ensures that they fully understand the information and the options available to them.
- The work with countries to establish a “deal” structure that is a “reasonable” outcome for all countries. This can be done directly by the CEO or at senior levels within the Secretariat or by providing Independent advisors to each country
- To use the provision of the agreement to appropriately record the decision so that it is not continually revisited. It should provide a stable base for the next steps.

This is a new and challenging space for the Secretariat. Structures that have a project focus i.e. BDP/SEA/Environment etc with their own drivers and external stakeholders to satisfy are difficult to align to rapidly changing negotiating space and to the provision of information that is “fit for purpose” for the negotiations.

In more mature Basin Organisations a cell of senior people representing the key discipline area would develop a corporate view on the depth of the information

needed to support particular negotiations and also work to develop a deal structure for consideration. This is simply because no other group is in the same position to take a strategic Basin view. The CEO would then in conjunction with the chairman of the Joint Committee develop a strategy to engage the countries in the discussions, debate and negotiations necessary to reach a decision.

Provisions of the agreement that empower the Secretariat

The provisions of the MRC Agreement outline a set of responsibilities for the Secretariat. It can largely do anything that is directed by the Joint committee that is consistent with the Agreement

The Secretariat shall render technical and administrative services to the Council and Joint Committee, and be under the supervision of the Joint Committee.

The functions and duties of the Secretariat will be to:

- 1. Carry out the decisions and tasks assigned by the Council and Joint Committee under the direction of and directly responsible to the Joint Committee;**
- 2. Provide technical services and financial administration and advise as requested by the Council and Joint Committee;**
- 3. Formulate the annual work program, and prepare all other plans, project and program documents, studies and assessments as may be required;**
- 4. Assist the Joint Committee in the implementation and management of projects and programs as requested;**
- 5. Maintain databases of information as directed;**
- 6. Make preparations for sessions of the Council and Joint Committee; and,**
- 7. Carry out all other assignments as may be requested.**