



77th Annual General Meeting MINUTES

Time: 3:30pm

Date: Wednesday, 19 May 2021

Location: Wentworth Civic Centre, corner of Darling Street & Silver City Highway

Murray Darling Association Incorporated
ABN 64 636 490 493

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1. Welcome

1.1 Opening address

The Hon Keith Pitt MP, Minister Resources, Water and Northern Australia, Department of Agriculture, Water and Environment provided an opening address to the meeting

1.2 Welcome address

MDA National President, Cr David Thurley OAM welcomed delegates to the 2021 Murray Darling Association Annual General Meeting and declared the meeting open at 3.30pm.

The National President also thanked Cr Paul Maytom, Chair Region 9 and Pete George, Treasurer as this is their last MDA AGM as they are retiring.

2. Attendance

2.1 Present

Delegate	Title	Council/Organisation
Cr David Thurley OAM	MDA National President, Chair Region 1, Councillor	Albury City Council
Cr Bronwyn Thomas	Chair Region 2, Councillor	Federation Council
Cr Jane MacAllister	Chair Region 4, Councillor	Wentworth Shire Council
Cr Peter Raison	Chair Region 5, Councillor	Mid Murray Council
Cr Melissa Rebbeck	Chair Region 6, Councillor	Alexandrina Council
Cr Andrew Tilley	Chair Region 7, Councillor	City of Mitcham
Cr Brian Lockyer	Chair Region 8, Councillor	Barunga West Council
Cr Paul Maytom	Chair Region 9, Councillor	Leeton Shire Council
Mayor Craig Davies	Chair Region 10A, Councillor	Narromine Council
Cr John Campbell	Chair Region 11, Councillor	Gunnedah Shire Council
Pete George	Treasurer	M&S Group
Emma Bradbury	Chief Executive Officer	Murray Darling Association
Heather Barclay	General Manager Assets and Infrastructure	Rural City of Murray Bridge
Nathan Bicknell	Executive Officer	MDA Region 6
Cr Marion Browne	Councillor	Broken Hill City Council
Mayor Jamie Chaffey	Councillor	Gunnedah Shire Council
Jennie Coleman		
Cr Robin Coleman	Councillor	City of Tea Tree Gully Council
Cr Geoffrey Dobson	Councillor	Greater Shepparton City Council
Michael Drum	Executive Officer	Macquarie River Food & Fibre
Bradley Ferris	Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Infrastructure, Planning & Environment	Albury City Council
Pauline Frost	Life Member	
Hannah Gebert	Tourism Support Officer	Wentworth Shire Council
Cr Steve Heywood	Councillor	Wentworth Shire Council

Delegate	Title	Council/Organisation
Cr Tracy Hill	Councillor	Coorong District Council
Cr Margaret Howie	Councillor	Renmark Paringa Council
Cr Peter Jamieson	Councillor	City of Port Adelaide Enfield
Cr Greg James (3:30pm – 4:15pm) (virtual)	Councillor	Greater Shepparton City Council
Cr Colin Jones	Councillor	Berrigan Shire Council
Cr John Kennedy	Councillor	Campbelltown City Council
Mayor Greg Conkey OAM (virtual)	Councillor	City of Wagga Wagga
Cr Darren Kruse	Councillor	City of Mitcham
Andrew Lawson	Team Leader City Projects	Albury City Council
Mayor Brenton Lewis	Councillor	Rural City of Murray Bridge
Geoff Lucas	Individual member	
Cr Peter Mansfield	Councillor	Moira Shire Council
Cr Marie Martin	Councillor	Moira Shire Council
James Marshall	Policy Officer	Murray Darling Association
Bridget Mather	Chief Executive Officer	Coorong District Council
Mayor Jason Modica	Councillor	Mildura Rural City Council
Mayor Susan Nichols	Mayor	Wentworth Shire Council
Mayor Phillip O'Connor	Councillor	Brewarrina Shire Council
Cr Jodi Reynolds	Councillor	Mildura Rural City Council
Ken Ross	General Manager	Wentworth Shire Council
Cr Greg Sauer	Deputy Mayor	Tenterfield Shire Council
Jeff Sowiak	General Manager	Brewarrina Shire Council
Bede Spannagle	Director of Engineering	Riverina Water County Council
Bob Stewart	Administrator	Central Darling Shire Council
Sharolyn Taylor	Minute Taker	Murray Darling Association
Cr George Weston	Deputy Mayor	Leeton Shire Council
Cr Peter Wright	Councillor	Cowra Council
Linda Yates (virtual)	Individual member	

2.2 Apologies

Delegate	Title	Council
Roy Butler MP	Member of Parliament	
Michael Colreavy	Administrator	Balranald Shire Council
Thornton Harfield	Director Assets & Environment	City of Tea Tree Gully
Mayor Barry Hollman	Councillor	Bourke Shire Council
Oliver McNulty	General Manager	Balranald Shire Council
Mayor Phyllis Miller	Chair Region 10, Councillor	Forbes Shire Council
Mayor Samantha O'Toole	Chair Region 12, Councillor	Balonne Shire Council
Cr Brett Otto	Mayor	South Burnett Regional Council
Mark Pitt	CEO	South Burnett Regional Council

2.3 Declarations of Interest

Nil

3. Confirmation of Previous Minutes

MOTION

(Cr B Lockyer / Mayor P Maytom)

That the minutes of 76th MDA Annual General Meeting held on 16 September 2020 be accepted as an accurate record. **CARRIED**

4. 2020 - 2021 Annual Report and Financial Statements

MDA Treasurer, Pete George presented the 2020 – 2021 Annual Report and Financial Statements.

MOTION

(P George/Cr P Raison)

That the 2020 – 2021 Annual report and Financial Statements for the year ending 31 March 2021 be received and noted. **CARRIED**

5. Motions on Notice

Motion 5.1 RECREATIONAL WATER

Federation Shire Council, Region 2

MOTION

(Cr B Thomas/ Cr G Dobson)

That the Murray Darling Association advocate for:

1. The importance for local government in providing and maintaining viable recreational water for their communities.
2. The quantification of economic value provided by tourism and other passive water uses.
3. The allocation of an economic value to such environmental water as may be required to balance extractive and passive water uses.

Cr M Rebbeck proposed an amendment to point three of the motion to:

3. *Where possible provide environmental water at times when recreational needs are also high.*

The mover and seconder of the motion accepted the amendment

The AMENDMENT became the MOTION

The MOTION and was PUT to the VOTE

MOTION*(Cr B Thomas/ Cr G Dobson)*

That the Murray Darling Association advocate for:

1. The importance for local government in providing and maintaining viable recreational water for their communities.
2. The quantification of economic value provided by tourism and other passive water uses.
3. Where possible provide environmental water at times when recreational needs are also high.

CARRIED**Objective:**

To support diversification of river operation to provide balance for communities and economies relying on the river for non-irrigation uses.

Key Arguments:

- Basin communities rely on our river systems for more than irrigation alone, and the visitor economy supports so many of our communities' and our governments objectives.
- The provision of a reliable source of recreational water for the health/wellbeing and creation of opportunity for social connection is a vital linkage in our rural regional communities. A water body provides a source of "time-out" from the everyday routine.
- Recognition of the social impact when recreational water cannot be provided to a community needs to be reviewed and documented.
- By simply maintaining river heights in the Murray during peak tourism periods, Basin Governments can save communities millions of dollars. This would also mitigate the reputational damage basin communities suffer when rivers are low or flowing too quickly for passive water users.
- The visitor economy generates almost \$12 billion dollars a year in the Basin. With Australia looking to rebuild its economy in the post-Covid era, and governments driving regional visitation, management of the river systems in the Murray-Darling is key.
- In this time of changing climate, economies, and technologies we see a significant opportunity, now more than ever before, to recognize and value the full spectrum of water uses in our river management framework, especially those that contribute positively to the environmental health and well-being of the ecosystem and support economic diversity and resilience. It is essential to the social, cultural, and economic wellbeing of our communities.

MOTION*(Mayor P Maytom/B Stewart)***That the Murray Darling Association:**

- 1. Call on the National Water Infrastructure Grid Taskforce and the NSW State Government to inquire into the merits and feasibility of the Lake Mejum / Lake Coolah project, and**
- 2. Commend the project to the One Basin CRC for detailed assessment of industry lead efficiencies.**

CARRIED**Objective:**

- To improve and optimize the water logistics in the Murrumbidgee Valley for both the Environmental Water Holder and Irrigators
- Beneficial improvements and outcomes will assist the Environmental water holder achieve their outcomes, through better timing and positioning of water during the winter months.
- Reduction on logistics pressure on the Murrumbidgee River when environmental flows and irrigator flows are competing for flow space.
- Assist in flood mitigation around North Wagga Wagga and between Berembed Weir and Yanco Weir
- Permit greater optimisation of the Snowy Mountain network of water storages in managing carry over inter seasonal irrigation and environmental water.
- Opportunity to allow greater confidence to communities and industries within the Murrumbidgee Valley to forward plan and establish security around their commercial ventures.

Key Arguments:

- Capable of being managed into and complementary to the NSW sustainable diversion plan.
- Murrumbidgee Valley irrigated agriculture has moved to a more permanent cropping regime requiring the management of carry over inter-seasonal water.
- The Environmental Water holder in a new user of both water storage and water logistic assets that competes irrigators and agribusiness across both assets' classes.
- Water management practices need to be developed to manage the needs of the current and future environmental and agribusiness requirements.
- Opportunity to build a large efficient winter month (April – October) operated off river storage for both the management of environmental flows and outcomes, plus service the carryover water requirements for permanent crops, allowing greater airspace in the Snowy Mountain storages to capture more of the Spring and Summer inflows
- Water storage for inflows to the Murrumbidgee Valley below the major Snowy Mountain storages
- LIDAR survey and solar pumping of water will allow better engineering using current and contemporary design of water storages at Lake Coolah and Lake Mejum than what was previously perceived, the lakes could become a series of smaller lakes pumping from the lowest to highest to ensure surface area is limited to evaporation.
- Low cost per megalitre water storage asset that can be shared equitably amongst all stakeholders.
- Attractive development asset for private – public investment
- Sustainable future refinement and development of the Murrumbidgee Valley will stall and halt.

Summary:

- Lake Coolah – Lake Mejum development opportunity must be viewed through the lenses of current and future day agribusiness and environmental requirements; much has changed over the past two decades.
- New surveying technologies and available to refine the design storage concepts and solar (with battery backup) pumping large volumes of water is now a proven resource.
- Environmental flows competing with summer irrigation demand will eventually kill the river system.
- Lake Coolah – Lake Mejum development offers a low per megalitre cost water storage asset to sustain and potentially optimise both environmental outcomes along with community and commercial pursuits

MOTION*(Cr M Rebbeck / Cr P Raison)*

That the Murray Darling Association call on Basin Governments to initiate, fund and implement further research and development, adoption, and commercialisations into alternative carp mitigation/controls to the proposed Cyprinid Herpesvirus 3.

CARRIED**Objective:**

To explore bulk harvest and marketing opportunities to exploit the Carp as a resource that could benefit Basin Communities by sustaining novel and circular economies.

Key Arguments:

- Carp's bulk harvest could support many market potentials, including but not limited to fertiliser, protein, human consumption, and international export. There is untapped export demand for our virus-free fish, with Carp considered a normal part of the diet in many countries across Europe and Asia.
- By contrast Carp as a table fish have established an unwarranted stigma in Australia. However, the Australian pallet is changing and targeted marketing and promotion of Carp for human consumption, supported by appropriate preparation methods (e.g. catch and cooking techniques, pate', sausage rolls, fish patties, Mornay etc.) would support a burgeoning domestic demand. Carp are not typically targeted by recreational fishers but can be a fantastic sport fish, a sector that could help support regional economies.
- The impact of the European Carp on Australia's river systems, including the Murray Darling Basin, is well documented with the Federal Government implementing the National Carp Control Program in 2016. However, the Terms of Reference restricted the mitigation measures primarily toward the Cyprinid Herpesvirus 3 with a follow up of Daughterless Carp (genetic mitigation).
- The Federal Government has spent millions of dollars on research their Carp Control Program, with little practical impact on the rivers and waterways. Whilst the government consternates in its decision to release the Virus, hundreds of tonnes of Carp could be removed from the rivers and breeding through proven practical measures. Such as the introduction of "Daughterless Carp" to reduce the reproduction rate and increase the number of Carp Separation Cages at all river barriers such as weirs and regulators.
- The Williams' Carp Separation Cage (CSC Separation Cage) exploits the Carp's natural behaviour to migrate upstream and its willingness to jump small waterfalls instead of our native fish. It has been in use at the Blanchetown weir with great success following a trial period when it removed 300 tonnes of Carp and now, averaging 80-100t per year, whilst allowing our native fish to continue upstream through Fishways. NSW DPI followed, using the CSC in several key locations, which supports a niche fertiliser industry with potential to be replicated and scaled.

MOTION

(Mayor J Modica / Cr M Browne)

That the Murray Darling Association call to halt floodplain harvesting and unregulated take of overland flows until there is a mechanism that can accurately measure the take from all floods, with the intent of protecting the integrity of end-of-system flows for all rivers in the basin.

Cr M Rebbeck proposed an AMENDMENT to the motion

That the Murray Darling Association advocate for increased governance measures for mitigating unregulated take of overland flows that can accurately measure the take from all floods, with the intent of protecting the integrity of end of system flows for all rivers in the basin.

The AMENDMENT was PUT to the VOTE and was CARRIED

The AMENDMENT became the MOTION

The MOTION was PUT to the VOTE

MOTION

Cr M Rebbeck / Mayor J Chaffey)

That the Murray Darling Association advocate for increased governance measures for mitigating unregulated take of overland flows that can accurately measure the take from all floods, with the intent of protecting the integrity of end of system flows for all rivers in the basin. **CARRIED**

Objective:

To protect the integrity of end-of-system flows for all rivers in the basin.

MOTION

(Mayor J Modica / Cr J MacAllister)

That the Murray Darling Association consider, and support scientifically agreed end of system flows to protect and preserve the ephemeral rivers of the Basin for the benefit of community, flora and fauna and economically sustainable horticulture and agriculture.

CARRIED

Objective:

To protect and preserve the ephemeral rivers of the Basin for the benefit of community, flora and fauna and economically sustainable horticulture and agriculture.

Minutes to be confirmed at the 78th AGM

MOTION*(B Stewart / Cr J MacAllister)***That the Murray Darling Association call on Basin Governments to:**

- 1. Support the work required to determine eligibility of the Menindee Lakes system as a Ramsar listed site; and**
- 2. If deemed eligible call on the NSW government to designate the Menindee Lakes system as a Ramsar site.**
- 3. Recognise the environmental and cultural significance of the Menindee Lakes System and ensure the system is operated to preserve these values by delivering adequate water flows. **CARRIED****

Objective:

To give priority to fresh water through-out the Darling River system, from the Queensland border to Wentworth.

To mitigate the adverse loss of water in the Menindee Lakes and consequent devastating impact on the community socially, economically, and environmentally which has been well documented.

Key Arguments:

- Central Darling Council has long recognized the importance of the Menindee lakes ecosystem and is sponsoring a proposal to have the Lakes listed as a Ramsar site. Support has been obtained from the Western Division of Councils, The Far West Joint Organisation of Councils, Regional Development Australia Far West NSW, Murray Darling Association and Local Government Association NSW.
- A volume target for Lake Wetherell and Lake Parmamroo in the Menindee Lakes Scheme, should be set to provide for up to two years water security for the Lower Darling to prevent the potential for future fish kills. Such a volume would be consistent with the original intent of the management of the Menindee Lakes, to provide two years drought reserve for far-west NSW.
- The River System has long held important spiritual and cultural values to the Aboriginal populations along the river, and this needs to be recognized in all management decisions.
- Due to the latest drought and the resultant period of no flow in the river, the community has experienced first-hand the following impacts:
 - towns with severe water restrictions, having to source bottled water for drinking
 - devastating fish kills at Menindee
 - drying of the region's wetlands
 - the loss of cultural connection by our First Nations peoples to the river
- Ramsar convention and signing on wetlands took place on 2 February 1971 at the small Iranian town named Ramsar and came into force on 21 December 1975. Since then, the Convention on Wetlands has been known as the Ramsar Convention.
- The Ramsar Convention's intentions is to halt the worldwide loss of wetlands and to conserve, through wise use and management, of those that remain. This requires international cooperation, policy making, capacity building and technology transfer. Under the Ramsar Convention, a wide variety of natural and human-made habitat types ranging from rivers to coral reefs can be classified as wetlands. Wetlands include swamps, marshes, billabongs, lakes, salt marshes, mudflats, mangroves, coral reefs, fens, peat bogs, or bodies of water - whether natural or artificial, permanent, or temporary. Water within these areas can be static or flowing; fresh, brackish, or saline; and can include inland rivers and coastal or marine water to a depth of six metres at low tide.
- There are 66 Ramsar sites in Australia, covering 8.3 million hectares. The NSW Office of Environment and Heritage is responsible for managing the majority of Ramsar wetlands in NSW, including: Blue Lake (in Kosciuszko NP), Gwydir Wetlands (part only - Gwydir Wetlands SCA), Hunter Estuary Wetlands (Kooragang component), Lake Pinaroo (in Sturt NP), Little Llangothlin NR, Macquarie Marshes (Macquarie Marshes NR component), Myall Lakes, Narran Lakes, NSW Central Murray State Forests (Millewa Forests and Werai Forests components), Paroo River Wetlands, and Towra Point NR.¹
- In 2010-11 there were attempts to have a proportion of the Menindee Lakes recognised as being listed as a Ramsar site. Regional Development Australia Far West NSW (RDAFW) invested resources and efforts into having a proportion of the Lakes listed as a Ramsar Sites on behalf of Central Darling Shire and the Far West Region. At this point in time, the State Government recognised the significance of the Menindee Lakes, however they were not able to support the project with the position of the Murray Darling Basin Plan at the time.
- In 2019 the MDA resolved at Motion 5.2 That the MDA calls on Basin Governments to endorse the Menindee Lakes, or a portion of the Lake system to be listed as a Ramsar site, in further consultation with the community and supported by science.

¹ <https://www.centraldarling.nsw.gov.au/f.ashx/Documents/CouncilMeetings/June2019OrdinaryCouncilMeeting/June-2019-Ordinary-Council-Meeting-Draft-Minutes.pdf>

MOTION*(B Stewart / Cr S Haywood)*

That the Murray Darling Association call on Basin Governments to ensure that:

1. **NSW Water Sharing Plans and Resource Management Plans for the Barwon-Darling, Murray-Lower Darling and Northern Basin Rivers must include minimum river flow and storage levels that will protect the health of the Barwon-Darling and Lower Darling River from the Queensland border to the Murray River.**
2. **Minimum flows at sites along the Barwon-Darling and Lower Darling River, in particular at Wilcannia, and water storage volumes in the Menindee Lakes must be reached before extraction of water for irrigation is allowed.**
3. **So called 'dead water' in the Lakes is discounted in the calculation of trigger points.**
4. **480 GL is 100% accessible to the Lower Darling.**

CARRIED**Objective:**

To ensure that the environmental needs of native fish, town water supply; the domestic and stock watering needs of riparian landowners and the native title and cultural requirements, along the length of the river are provided for, as a priority, during extended dry periods.

Key Arguments:

The Lower Darling communities of the Darling/Baarka are continuing to seek to work with governments to develop equitable policy to address the issue of connectivity.

Inflows - The Menindee target should be an 18 months' supply to run the lower Darling south of Menindee. This represents a timeframe not a specific number as the volume varies if the 18 months covers 2 summers and 1 winter or 2 winters and 1 summer. This is similar to the targets that used to be in place when Broken Hill was relying on the lakes for water, it would be a reinstatement of old rules, not introducing new ones.

Outflows –480GL of active water need to be retained in the top two lakes (Pamamaroo and Wetherell), with any dead or undeliverable water excluded from the 480/640 rule and remain in the Lake system for environmental & cultural benefit, reversing the current "use it or lose it" policy.

DPIE needs to develop a pathway forward to address community apprehension around water quality and water reliability. There are some that are acceptable to ensure cultural environmental protection/enhancement and enhanced management of operations are achievable, but all need to be particularised in detail to enable sound debated to achieve a positive result for all.

Without the Menindee SDLAM project further buy backs of water will have to be achieved from the Southern Basin risking significant adverse impact for some communities.

FPH should be licensed, but the carryover mechanism must be reviewed. Options include either reducing it or make it on an allocation system- i.e., following an extended dry period, nil carryover would be allocated and only licensed take available.

Regulation on the take of supplementary events in the Northern Basin should align with the principles of the Water Sharing Plans (WSP)s which must prioritise dependant eco systems overtake/extraction.

WSP need to identify and align to downstream needs between valleys in order to avoid separating the Northern and Southern Basin which has resulted in Wilcannia as the final Darling River town splitting the Darling in two (Wentworth is the Southernmost Darling town at its junction with the Murray).

Historically embargos were placed on the extraction of Northern Basin Tributary supplementary events and access to C class licenses to protect water for Broken Hill when their active storage fell below 21 months, we are asking for this to be reinstated into WSPs to achieve minimum river flow and storage levels at Menindee.

MOTION*(Cr M Rebbeck / Cr A Tilley)*

That the Murray Darling Association work with CSIRO and other agencies to:

1. Investigate and report on the sustainability of the Sustainable Diversion Limits (SDLs) within the MDB plan in the face of climate change projections and trends.
2. Identify options for climate change preparedness to help councils adapt to and mitigate the impacts of climate change.
3. Prepare for the development and implementation of Basin Plan 2.0.
4. Call for a review on how low the environmental water allocation became what it is to the 2750GL, and what the requirements are for the future.

CARRIED**Objective:**

To facilitate an evidence-based approach to reviewing current SDLS and future scenarios in response to climate change trends and projections.

To ensure adequate flows now and into the future for environmental rehabilitation and community sustainability across the MDB.

Key Arguments:

- When it comes to optimising the benefits to Basin communities and the environment, "to be forewarned is to be forearmed". Stakeholders across the MDB can only benefit from transparent SDLs projections under different climatic scenarios. Information that will support participation in setting and meeting appropriate targets.
- A review of SDLs will ensure that they adequately account for reduced flows due to drought and climate change.
- The MDB has been severely affected by drought over the last ten years, with each successive drought more severe than the previous, with 2019 being the worst drought on record. Rainfall and temperature trends are alarming, resulting in lower flows into the MDB, including:
 - 9000 GL since 1892
 - 7700 GL last 30 years
 - 5700 GL last 10 years
 - 2800 GL 2018
 - <2000 GL 2019
- The scientific consensus from the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is that these negative trends will only continue to intensify and compound impacting, water flow, productivity, and the social and environmental health of the MDB.
- The entire MDB will be better informed to implement and adjust the SDLs within the MDB plan to benefit river communities and the Nation.
- The original volume of water identified scientifically to bring river systems back to partial health was a minimum of 3900GL and rivers growing back to regulated full health was 7900GL. These numbers compared with the current (not fully recovered) 2750GL represent how far-removed water politics is from the science of hydrology. This has reduced what the Murray, Darling and all Basin Rivers and communities need for a healthy future.

MOTION*(Cr D Thurley / Mayor P Maytom)***That the Murray Darling Association:**

1. **Recognise that advanced technology and systems are available in the monitoring, metering and telemetry of large-scale flows and extraction and are currently used by agricultural industries in the Queensland Northern Basin.**
2. **Call on Basin Governments to collaborate with industry to adopt consistent systems for monitoring, metering, and telemetry of overland and floodplain flows and unregulated take. CARRIED**

Objective:

To build confidence, ensure connected accountable and consistent river management rules for all valleys and water users that will in turn support more achievable end-of-system flows for all rivers in the Basin.

Key Arguments:

- Environmental flow rules in the water sharing plans for the regulated rivers vary from valley to valley, depending on which objectives were considered most important for that valley. Management rules in regulated river systems have a lot of flexibility because of the ability of the major storages to provide for environmental flow management. Therefore, rules may include controls on extractions under certain conditions as well as management of dam releases². This creates uncertainty for irrigators and downstream users alike.
- End-of-system flow requires a flow to be retained at the end of the river system. This ensures that flow is maintained below the areas of major extraction³.
- Currently, Environmental flow rules in the regulated rivers in NSW apply only to the valleys of Belubula, Namoi, Murrumbidgee, Hunter, Paterson.⁴
- Changes to the rules for regulated valleys may occur as part of the revision of Water Sharing Plans for 2019, many of which are currently still under review or yet to be adopted.

² <https://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/plans-programs/water-sharing-plans/environmental-rules/river-management>

³ *ibid*

⁴ *ibid*

Motion 5.10 FIRST NATIONS REPRESENTATION IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Greater Shepparton City Council, Region 2

MOTION

(Cr G Dobson / Cr B Thomas)

That the Murray Darling Association support a process to promote greater representation of First Nations people in local government and in water policy.

CARRIED

Objective:

To support improved social, economic, environmental, and cultural outcomes in the Murray Darling Basin by supporting First Nations people to have a greater role in the decision making process.

To ensure local knowledge informs our national priorities.

Key Arguments:

- There are 40 Aboriginal nations in the Murray Darling Basin. The value and values of diversity of representation on local government is essential to ensuring better outcomes for a more sustainable Murray Darling Basin.
- Calls for an Indigenous voice have been made for a long time, and local government has a key role in supporting that process.
- In 2017 the [Uluru Statement from the Heart](#) and, consequent *Final Report* of the Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in November 2018 considered existing and proposed advisory structures that might inform the design, and that a co-design process should consider national, regional and local elements of The Voice and how they interconnect.⁵ The values and vision for local government outlined in MDA's [Strategic Plan Vision 2025](#) aligns with these considerations.
- Local government is that level of government closest to the communities we serve and plays a key role in ensuring local leadership informs our national priorities.
- This motion was proposed by the graduates of the Murray Darling Association Basin Communities Leadership Program held in Cunnamulla in 2021, and has been developed in consultation with and the approval of Northern Basin Aboriginal Nations (NBAN) and Murray Lower Darling Indigenous Nations MLDRIN.
- The Murray Darling Association [Strategic Plan 2020-25 \(Vision 2025\)](#): commits to *"First Nations culture is reflected in and supported by MDA policy and position statements."* (Pillar 3, Ref 3.5.3, Vision 2025).

5

https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Former_Committees/Constitutional_Recognition_2018/ConstRecognition/Final_Report/section?id=committees%2freportjnt%2f024213%2f26813

Cr Greg James left the meeting at 4:15pm

MOTION

(Cr M Rebbeck / Cr A Tilley)

That the Murray Darling Association support in principle the findings of the Independent report "[Managing Delivery Risks in the River Murray System](#)" (the Report) and work towards supporting the implementation of its future recommendations to mitigate deliverability risk in the Southern Basin. **LOST**

Objective:

To support MDB stakeholders to mitigate the risks of deliverability in the southern Basin. That the MDA find or allocate funds to further extension of the outcomes of the Report.

A commitment to understanding the Report in particularly the movement of Commonwealth Environmental Water Holdings throughout the Basin.

"Environmental water deliveries each year are generally largest over the May to December period and smaller during the peak irrigation demand period of January to April. The timing reflects environmental watering requirements and generally avoids the peak irrigation demand period, lessening competition for channel capacity between the two water uses".

All stakeholders will benefit from a better understanding of the complexity of River Operations and Water Delivery. In order to allow irrigators to optimise their allocations and for environmental managers to better understand and manage their regions.

Key Arguments:

- Understandably, Basin communities are concerned about bank erosion and damage to their river and amenity. The common perception perpetuated by social media is that the delivery of Environmental Water and permanent plantings expansion are the cause, and the Basin Plan is to blame. However, while the Report acknowledges that the River Murray system's key reaches and its tributaries are operating at flows above tolerable seasonal rates. E-water delivery is generally not putting additional pressure on historic peak flows of summer and autumn down the Murray River system.
- The Report also demonstrates that, while Inter Valley Trade (IVT) is a significant water source, there has been no increase in water demand from the River Murray system. Moreover, while, Land use –irrigation has moved downstream into the Sunraysia region, there has been no discernible change in timing, and the current trade rule has ensured no net increase in downstream trade.
- While there are many interrelated factors, the largest contributor is the Barmah Choke, where capacity has steadily reduced (by up to 20 per cent) over the last three decades. This loss combined with stable demand contributes to the prolonged excessive flow conditions and associated Bank erosion. Sediment cores suggest the "Sand Slug" results from historical gold mining, land clearing, de-snagging and river regulation.
- Bank erosion and delivery risk are emotive issues that galvanises action from communities, however, if all contributing factors are not well understood it does nothing to resolve the problem.
- River Operations and Water Delivery in the Murray Darling Basin is highly complex. The Report and continued extension of the findings in a user-friendly manner will help transform an emotive issue (erosion) into an operational issue (water delivery) required to promote constructive conversations and develop pragmatic solutions.

MOTION*(Cr M Rebbeck / Mayor J Modica)*

That the Murray Darling Association call on the Federal government to develop and implement a policy for Australia to become carbon neutral by 2050.

CARRIED**Objective:**

To maximise Australia's contribution to mitigating climate change and to contribute toward minimising severity of the current negative projections for the Murray Darling Basin.

To ensure agriculture across the Murray Darling Basin is supported to contribute to an Australian policy for carbon neutrality by 2050.

Key Arguments:

- The world is heading towards net-zero emissions. In December 2015, 195 countries, including Australia, agreed on the United Nations Paris Agreement on climate change. For the first time in history, both developed and developing countries have committed to reducing the amount of carbon dioxide they emit into the atmosphere.⁶
- With appropriate support, agriculture across the MDB has opportunities to both adapt and mitigate climate change through carbon sequestration, solar and wind energy, waste efficiency, circular economies, and more while increasing productivity and economic prosperity.
- Australia needs to contribute to the global solution of carbon neutrality by 2050. The Federal Government must recognise that agriculture can play a key role in mitigating and adapting to climate change while improving productivity.
- Agriculture takes up 50pc of Australia at 384 342 500 hectares. Federal Government policy and support could encourage each farmer to sequester a minimum of 1 tonne/ha/yr of carbon being 384 342 500 tonnes of carbon mitigated per year (minimum with minor changes). Each tonne of carbon sequestered will increase water holding capacity, production, and the economic output of agriculture.
- Although representing just 14% of Australia's total land area, the MDB contains 20% of Australia's agricultural land and contributes to 40% of the total agricultural production. Collectively generating a gross value of over \$15 billion the MDB will contribute strongly to the Federal Government Agricultural Productivity Target Bill (\$60 billion), while mitigating and adapting to climate change.
- The MDB has been severely affected by drought over the last decade, with 2019 being the worst drought ever on record and worse than the previous. Rainfall and Temperature trends are alarming, resulting in lower flows into the MDB, including:
 - 9000 GL since 1892,
 - 7700 GL last 30 years
 - 5700 GL previous 10 years
 - 2800 GL 2018; and
 - <2000 GL 2019
- The International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) highlights that these negative trends will only continue to intensify and compound impacting, productivity and the social and environmental health of the MDB unless unilateral actions to reduce carbon dioxide from current 410ppm to (350 ppm) and to limit warm to (1 degree).
- There is much research to date that shows that by improving soil carbon, we can mitigate climate change and build production and profitability through; improved soil moisture, better feed efficiencies and reduce methane and enhance production. Cost can also be reduced through investment in, efficient waste solutions, solar and renewable energy.
- Moreover, there are growing international carbon market. Affording Australian farmer's opportunities to access these markets through carbon offsets (planting and soil carbon) would help them to diversify their business risk under a variable climate. These opportunities would support a policy for Australia to become carbon negative by 2050.
- Industries, local and state governments are now setting targets of carbon-neutral by 2030 such as Meat and Livestock Australia, Dairy SA, and more, as they recognise the potential of agriculture to contribute to this goal. If Federal Government were on board too, carbon negativity by 2050 could be a reality. It is time for Federal Government to get on board, recognise the opportunities for economic prosperity and support Australia by setting carbon neutral target for 2050.
- Both the NSW and the SA State governments, and possibly others have committed to an aspirational objective of achieving net-zero emissions by 2050.⁷
- There are other economic and technology opportunities that the MDB could be implementing such as solar, wind, hydro power. As the MDA is primarily associated with councils, we also have a role to play in supporting circular waste to energy opportunities, greening our landscapes and farms all resulting in economic opportunities for carbon abatement.

⁶ <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/-/media/OEH/Corporate-Site/Documents/Climate-change/achieving-net-zero-emissions-by-2050-fact-sheet-160604.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/-/media/OEH/Corporate-Site/Documents/Climate-change/achieving-net-zero-emissions-by-2050-fact-sheet-160604.pdf>

MOTION*(Mayor B Lewis / Cr M Rebbeck)***That the Murray Darling Association:**

- 1. Acknowledge the challenges inherit in providing adequate information to inform communities and debunk Basin myths.**
- 2. Encourage Basin Governments to continue to collaborate to minimise myths and misinformation that exists across the Murray-Darling Basin.**
- 3. Call on government to support and resource appropriate community lead education and training programs.**

CARRIED**Objective:**

To support constructive discussion and debate by extending science-based reports to basin communities and the general public.

To continue to work together to actively correct myths and misinformation that exist across the Murray Darling Basin through the extension of clear and straightforward facts (in the form of videos, fact sheets, and conference presentations).

Key Arguments:

- Disinformation about the River inhibits constructive discussion about issues and improved management. It only acts to causes unnecessary friction and distraction from the real issues. It would help if the MDA, MDBA, CSIRO and Government water ministers were proactive in correcting misinformation and be transparent about River Operations, which will help all the communities work together better.
- Perpetuation of myths and false information usurp efforts to provide equality and understanding, creating disharmony and a lack of trust in managing water. Examples include but are not limited to:
 - The Lower Lakes/Coorong Estuary myth
 - Support to build Lock Zero with no consideration of the impacts this would have on water quality, community and irrigators in that region
 - The character of Inter Valley Transfers (temperature, speed, and volume)
 - Biodiversity characteristics
 - Rules on allocation, preferences for permanent plantings over annual use
 - Flood Plain Harvesting
 - Darling and Menindee Lakes
 - NSW Government rules and aims for allocation of some agriculture over human needs
 - Over allocation or the lack of available water to meet these allocations is never mentioned as a problem
 - New dams make new water.
- This motion is an attempt to remedy the arguments, angst and fighting that will otherwise continue to the detriment of the basin Plan and the Communities.

MOTION*(B Stewart / Cr B Lockyer)***That the Murray Darling Association both call on and support Basin Governments to:**

- 1. Establish end of system and valley specific flow targets required to restore the health of the Barwon-Darling to Wentworth.**
- 2. Collaborate to design and develop an agreed option and business case for the Menindee Lakes Project.**
- 3. Commission an independent analysis based in the best available science to determine the provisions and circumstances under which end of system and valley specific flow targets and the Menindee Lakes Project can align.**

CARRIED**Objective:**

To support NSW and other Basin Governments and the community to work together to progress the reconfiguration of the Menindee Lakes; and to establish agreed, reliable, and sustainable management provisions to balance the regulation of take with the health of the end of system.

Key Arguments:

- The NSW State Government is currently undertaking a broad range of ambitious and complex reforms in the management and regulation water in NSW including:
 1. Healthy Flood Plains Project establishing a regulatory framework for flood water harvesting. The project will licence, measure, and manage floodplain extractions in the northern Basin, in line with the NSW Floodplain Harvesting Policy, floodplain management plans, water sharing plans and controls on water capture by 30 June 2024, and
 2. The Menindee Lakes Project, as one of 9 projects NSW Government is currently developing, in collaboration with local communities, key stakeholders and other Basin states,
- The NSW State Government has a clear commitment to an equitable, sustainable, and transparent approach to the management of water now and for future generations.⁸
- The SDLAM projects were created as a part of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan to protect communities and agricultural production while still delivering outcomes for the environment. A determination on the Menindee Lakes Project is a vital component of NSW meeting its Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment Mechanism (SDLAM) projects A failure to implement any one of them, particularly the Menindee Lakes Project represents a risk to the whole mechanism.
- Management and operation of the Menindee Lakes itself is complex and challenging, compounded by prolonged drought, and concurrent reforms to upstream floodplain harvesting rules and regulation of take. Consultation over many years has failed to identify a viable or agreed option for the project, with relations between community and government proving challenging.
- Upstream irrigators and downstream communities are looking for certainty and reliability in a highly unreliable system, creating challenges for irrigators, communities, and Basin Governments alike. Perceived gaps in the relationship between the FPH policy and the proposed Menindee Lakes project creates ongoing uncertainty for downstream communities and undermines the social licence of upstream irrigators. While these issues can be substantially addressed by linking upstream FPH extractions to downstream flow targets it is important that both government and communities are able to make informed decision based on the best available data and science.
- The Menindee Lakes project aims to strike a balance between maximising water savings and protecting the significant ecological, cultural heritage and socio-economic values in the Menindee Lakes, Lower Darling River and Great Darling Anabranch. It will focus on adjusting the sustainable diversion limit and deliver on the NSW Government commitment to the Murray Darling Basin Plan, and to deliver on NSW commitments under the Murray-Darling Basin Plan.⁹
- Water Infrastructure NSW is currently reviewing options for the Menindee Lakes Project in collaboration with community and technical representation from across government. Local and connected communities, industries and governments are seeking certainty and progress on both FPH and the Menindee Lakes Project.
- A commitment to establish end of system and valley specific flow targets required to restore the health of the Barwon-Darling to Wentworth; and to undertake the independent analysis based in the best available science to determine the provisions and circumstances under which such targets may be met will significantly progress implementation of the Basin Plan.
- Use of our national science agency CSIRO and the entire Commonwealth Water Family in collaboration with MDBA, NSW Government and of course communities to independently assess this problem will ensure that local knowledge informs our national priorities.
- The NSW Floodplain Harvesting Policy sets out the process for bringing floodplain harvesting into the water licensing framework. This is now being rolled out across the Northern Basin valleys.
- Regulating floodplain harvesting is a complex and ambitious water reform project, but a vitally important one."¹⁰

⁸ <https://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/what-we-do/how-water-is-managed>

⁹ <https://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/plans-programs/sdlam/menindee-lakes-project>

¹⁰ The Hon. Melinda Jane PAVEY, MP Minister for Water, Property and Housing, September 2019.

https://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0015/272301/floodplain-harvesting-action-plan.pdf

MOTION

(Cr J Reynolds / Mayor J Modica)

That the Murray Darling Association call for a review on how low the environmental water allocation became what it is to the 2750GL, and how we might move to rectify this oversight.

LOST

Minutes to be confirmed at the 78th AGM

MOTION

(Mayor J Modica / Cr J MacAllister)

That the Murray Darling Association advocate for its communities by calling on a Federal Royal Commission into the management and sustainability of water in the Murray Darling Basin with a full remit to conduct an independent audit on water saving schemes, trading, ownership, extraction, and allocation and with the power to subpoena representatives including politicians, government agencies and peak bodies.

CARRIED

Cr G Sauer, Tenterfield Shire Council requested his vote against the motion be recorded

Key Arguments:

The future of our Murray Darling River based communities lay with water security and river health for human, economic, social, and environmental wellbeing.

In view of evident water management issues and being in the midst of varying and ongoing droughts, Mildura Rural City Council requests that the Murray Darling Association (MDA) advocate for Murray Darling River based communities supporting the following motion passed by MRCC in August 2019 and by the Municipal Association of Victoria at their 2019 AGM.

Minutes to be confirmed at the 78th AGM

MOTION*(Cr D Thurley / Cr J Campbell)***That the Murray Darling Association:**

1. Does not support the proposed change of name to Murray-Darling Local Government Association.
2. Note the call for the MDA to consider alternate names in the future.

CARRIED**Objective:**

To close out 2020 Motion 5.18 Name Change to Murray-Darling Local Government Association, consultation.

Key Arguments:

The MDA's vision is for local government and communities **to work together** to achieve a healthy, vibrant, and thriving Murray-Darling Basin.

We value honesty, integrity, and collaborative communication based on mutual respect for our members, our environment, and the communities we serve. The MDA's our objective is to build relationships across local government, not to damage them.

It is clear from our consultation that while the majority of member councils responded positively to the proposal, we have heard very clearly that some stakeholders are violently opposed to the MDA changing the name to M-DLGA and would like to see the MDA consider alternatives.

Evidence of the division is reflected the range of resolutions on this issue from our member councils.

On 12 February 2021, the councils of Region 11 resolved that the proposed name change to Murray-Darling Local Government Association (M-DLGA) be endorsed. Many other councils resolved similar motions.

On 20 January 2021 MDA received correspondence from Campbelltown City Council advising council had resolved to request that Motion 5.18 be rescinded. The motion had already been actioned, making a recession impossible, however the sentiment of Campbelltown and other councils was received and noted.

A decision to change the name to the *Murray-Darling Local Government Association* would be divisive and at odds with the values and objectives of the MDA.

6. Next Meeting Date

To be advised.

7. Meeting Close

The Chair declared the meeting closed at 4:31pm