

**Working together to secure a healthy future for the
Lower Murray, Lakes and Coorong**

**Murray Darling Association Regional 6
Stakeholder Symposium Report**

25 September 2019
Fleurieu Function Centre
Goolwa South SA 5214

Background

The Murray Darling Association (MDA) is the peak-representative body representing local government and their communities across the Murray-Darling Basin.

The vision of the MDA is a healthy Murray-Darling Basin which supports thriving communities, economic development and sustainable productivity. The purpose of the MDA is to provide effective representation of local government and communities at a state and federal level in the management of Basin resources by providing information, facilitating debate and seeking to influence government policy.

The MDA comprises 12 regions across Queensland, New South Wales, Australian Capital Territory, Victoria and South Australia.

MDA Region 6 (Region 6) represents the interests of the Lower Murray, Lakes & Coorong region. Current membership of Region 6 includes Alexandrina Council, Coorong District Council, Rural City of Murray Bridge, Tatiara District Council, Southern Mallee District Council and City of Victor Harbor, along with a number of individual members with long-standing interest and experience in local water resource management issues.

Local governments form the core membership base of the MDA but individuals, businesses, not-for-profit and community service organisations can also become associate members.

Region 6 seeks to be a trusted source of information and a recognised and effective advocate with respect to the management of water resources within the Lower Murray, Lakes and Coorong region.

To achieve this, Region 6 has adopted a comprehensive Communications and Engagement Strategy which includes the following strategies:

- Increase community awareness of the purpose and role of the MDA and Region 6;
- Engage with key stakeholders to gather and share information and to develop and implement plans for addressing priority issues; and
- Represent the needs, challenges and aspirations of our membership and communities to key influencers and decision-makers in all three levels of government

In support of these goals, on 25 September 2019, Region 6 held a Stakeholder Symposium at the Fleurieu Function Centre in Goolwa titled “Working together to secure a healthy future for the Lower Murray, Lakes and Coorong”.

About the Symposium

The stakeholder symposium “Working together to secure a healthy future for the Lower Murray, Lakes and Coorong” brought together community groups, general public, council staff, elected members, government agencies, and MDA members with an interest in the future of the Lower Murray, Lakes and Coorong.

The aims of this stakeholder symposium were to:

- Develop a shared understanding of State and Federal agency priorities and projects regarding management of the Lower Murray, Lakes and Coorong;
- Find out what State and Federal agencies would like to see communicated from groups in our region;
- Discuss how Councils and community might best work together to secure a healthy future for the Lower Murray, Lakes & Coorong; and
- Identify how MDA Region 6 can best represent Lower Murray, Lakes and Coorong communities at state and federal level in the management of basin resources via the MDA Board.

Presentations included speakers from local, state and federal governments, the MDA CEO, and the Chair of MDA Region 6 (Attachment 1).

The Symposium was well attended with over 50 participants. 15% of participants came from government (local, state and federal); 9% from agriculture and industry, 20% from the community conservation sector, 13% from the advocacy – community conservation sector; and 28% did not identify to a group (“individuals”).

Participants were asked to identify their key reasons for attending the Symposium as captured by “Slido” - a live Q&A polling platform. Participants could choose more than one answer. 91% chose knowledge sharing, 50% chose networking, 31% chose speaker line-up and 28% chose “Have My Say” (Attachment 2).

Key findings

Online survey

Prior to the symposium, an online survey was available to the participants to gauge their level of collaboration, engagement, advocacy priorities and concerns (Attachment 3). The results clearly show that the participants already collaborate on a regular basis with a wide variety of groups, such as government agencies, community conservation and action groups (Q6) and that ongoing collaborations, cross memberships and advocacy were seen as a solution to work better together (Q9).

The top three advocacy priorities and/or policy concerns regarding the management of the basin’s water resources identified as common concerns issues such as (environmental) water management, management and maintenance of a healthy environment, water security and water quality (Q7).

The top three local project priorities (i.e. Lower Murray, Lakes & Coorong projects) in need of local, state or federal government collaboration or funding support included such a wide variety of answers that clusters are harder to recognise (Q8).

Presentations

The morning session consisted of a series of presentations which provided an excellent overview of the different parties involved in the management of the Murray-Darling Basin (Attachment 4). The current drought condition in Queensland and New South Wales, particularly the northern basin, and the impacts it has on the storage of water, delivery of the basin plan and water allocations, was a topic discussed in several presentations. Despite the drought conditions, spring water from the Commonwealth Environmental Water Office had been released and arrived at South Australia’s border at the time of the Symposium.

Workshop outcomes

The afternoon sessions included a series of group facilitation activities. The participants split up in seven groups (‘tables’) and discussed two main topics: ‘community priorities’ and ‘working together’ (Attachments 5 and 6).

Community priorities

The first round of group activity was to identify each group’s priorities and collective priorities as a region. The workshop notes (Attachment 5) reveal that drought preparedness was identified as a key issue as well as to keep the mouth open and the ecosystems healthy with the help of environmental flows. A key concern was that upstream users are not aware of the importance of the environmental water to the ecosystem, fishing and tourism industry of the Coorong, Lower Lakes and Murray River. The MDB Plan should be implemented in full and on time ensuring water supply and flow over the barrages. Improved cross basin understanding was highlighted with access to correct, transparent and

Working together

The groups were then asked if there is a benefit in working more closely together. They were further asked to outline how that may look like (Attachment 6).

The groups identified a common goal to work together as one voice with strong commitments to engagement with the whole community and across the basin. However, they also identified that this would require coordination, a shared understanding and information sharing. Advocacy including advocating politicians was a common theme: *"Make it a political issue so government take it seriously"*.

Solutions included annual meetings, regular meetings, central repository of information, an independent and respected chair, a platform to undertake factual and informed debates, well informed regularly updated membership, support from agencies and researchers, and attracting younger generations to the table.

Questions

Participants were able to submit their questions during the symposium via Slido. Where possible, questions were answered on the day. (**bold** = those already answered at the event):

- Does the 2750GL include the 450GL promised to SA?
- Does the Murray Mouth close when outflow stops?
- Upstream stakeholders think that our Lakes should not have fresh water. How does not allowing fresh water to flow into the lakes fix the drought?
- Will the draft MDA Strategic Plan be available prior to the conference?
- **Can we get a copy of these slides about the basin plan?**
- What are the steps being taken to counter the spread of misinformation about the basin, particularly related to environmental flows and environmental watering?
- **When will climate change be factored into the amount of environmental flow?**
- To whom and when might the environmental water be sold?
- Have you considered the political 'optic' of holding the MDA conference on Cubbie Station?
- Are the OUTCOMES of the Plan on track?
- What is the level of confidence (%) in the full delivery of the plan (Inc. the full 450GL)
- Shouldn't the complete focus of Project Coorong be on trying to claw back the precarious state of the coorong's ecosystem, rather than tourism?
- Do you have confidence in the return of 450gl to the environment, and over what timeframe?
- **Will there be a Ramsar Management plan advisory committee which includes community to oversee delivery of the plan?**
- **There is a similar process led by the community - the Coorong Environmental Trust. How will Project Coorong partner with the Trust?**
- Is it true that the \$70m funds was actually an underspend on the Murray Futures program?
- **Does Project Coorong cover or interact with the Lower Lakes?**
- What about fish and turtle longevity management?
- Is it possible to see actual inflows and rainfall against models and predictions to get an idea of predicted accuracy?
- **Are there min/max Lake Level & salinity levels that are factored into ongoing Lower Lakes Management? eg how low / how salty would the SA Gvt let the Lakes go?**
- **As the slides are very detailed and hard to read is it possible to get copies and send questions later?**
- How much of the money will be actually used on the ground?

- **What is going to happen in 2-3 years if inflows continue to fall?**
- A couple of days ago the ABC reported on water hijacking - how is this going to be policed?
- How flexible are the various plans and modelling systems presented this morning to take into account unexpected 'out of season' rainfall, given Climate Change?
- Does the modelling factor in the high rainfall in the Adelaide Hills?
- If we are anticipating multi- year dry periods when will DEW support the re-establishment of community nurseries which were efficacious in combating ASS?
- Is water trading the best way of allocating water, or should water entitlements be tied to land owners?
- What measures are being taken to prevent the ingress of salt water from the Coorong into the Lower Lakes through the dilapidated barrage gates during low levels?

Outcomes of the symposium

At the end of the symposium, participants were asked to state (through Slido) how they were feeling at the end of today's event – this is represented in the word cloud below.

In one word describe how you are feeling at the end of today's event.



Next steps

The outcomes of this Symposium will be used to potentially inform a regional strategy and an annual action plan.