



MINUTES

**MURRAY DARLING ASSOCIATION (MDA) INC.
REGION 9 ORDINARY MEETING
HELD VIA ZOOM THURSDAY, 17 MARCH 2022 AT 10.30AM**

PRESENT

Chair Cr Glen Andrezza (Deputy Mayor), Griffith City Council; Mayor Doug Curran, Griffith City Council (via Zoom); GM Brett Stonestreet, Griffith City Council; Cr Jenny Clarke, Narrandera Shire Council (via Zoom); David Farley, Chairman/Executive Director, Agribusiness Sector (via Zoom); Paul Maytom, GM John Scarce, Murrumbidgee Shire Council (via Zoom); CEO Mark Lamb, MDA (Via Zoom); Tim Phillips, Communications Officer, MDA Head Office (via Zoom); Bede Spannagle, Riverina Water (via Zoom); Cr Geoff Chapman, Hay Shire Council (via Zoom); Cr Gail Driscoll, Lockhart Shire Council (via Zoom); Cr Paul Smith, Leeton Shire Council (via Zoom)

1 APOLOGIES

Shane Wilson, Narrandera Shire Council; GM Jackie Kruger, Leeton Shire Council.

2 INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME

Chair welcomed all delegates and conducted an Acknowledgement of Country.

3 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Nil

4 MINUTES

RECOMMENDED on the motion of Paul Maytom and Cr Jenny Clarke that the minutes of the previous meeting on 18 November 2021, having first been circulated amongst the members be confirmed.

5.1 CEO'S REPORT

Mark Lamb indicated that the MDA Inc. Office has relocated to Albury, Mark in Albury and Tim Phillips has closed down the office in Echuca, but will work from Echuca.

Mark informed that the financials for the MDA Inc. organisation are influenced by the large termination pay for outgoing CEO. Mark indicated that his focus for short term is building the financials to make the organisation sustainable into the future.

Mark will focus on the Basin Communities Leadership Program across the regions with a number of workshops, as a commitment already made as a project under the Department of Land and Water, which should bring another tranche of funds.

Mark indicated that he has built a number of relationships with organisations and stakeholders and he has included both sides of politics at the Federal level, as well as CSIRO in terms of the circular economy and possible future recurrent funding opportunity.

Mark mentioned the MDA Conference in Albury is in September 2022.

5.2 MDA BOARD MEETINGS

MDA Board Meetings up to March 2022 are noted.

6 PRESENTATION

David Farley provided a Powerpoint Presentation via Zoom, taking the presentation through slides on the history of the Lake Mejum / Lake Coolah storage area, facts and figures and his observations of the potential storage project that has been a major topic of conversation and ideas for some time.

Underlying David's presentation is his advocacy for a feasibility study that will allow for a better understanding of approximate costings, required development work and structures that would need to be in place to support the storage project.

Paul Maytom and Jenny Clarke gave their positive review of the presentation and re-stated the broader advantage of a feasibility study of the Lake storage area for the near and wider region.

David Farley indicated his interest to stay involved in the progress towards any case that is presented to Government for a feasibility study. David Farley added that such a case needs to have the backing of a wide range of stakeholders in this area.

Chair Andreazza added that on behalf of the Region 9 membership he will pursue what will be required for a feasibility study to be undertaken, with obvious need for a resolution at a later stage from the membership.

A copy of the presentation was forwarded to the Region 9 Members following the Meeting.

7 ITEMS

7.1 Lake Mejum/Lake Coolah

Leeton Shire Council Lake Coolah feasibility Motion - Noted by the group.

7.2 Draft Murray and Murrumbidgee Regional Water Strategies

Draft Reports attached/referenced in the Agenda were noted by the group.

Brett Stonestreet highlighted the plan (draft Murray and Murrumbidgee Regional Water Strategies) and the inclusion within these draft documents (in section 4.4 on p144 +) that they are State Government initiatives and options or long range commitments.

Brett further indicated that it appeared the large number of options will likely be reduced.

Brett queried as to whether there will be a short list of options/strategies/projects that may or may not be costed and he importantly queried as to whether the public would have the opportunity to comment on these shortlisted items.

Bede Spannagle indicated that in his experience there would be a document that would likely present with overarching detail. Bede agreed with Brett that the next draft, a short list of options needs to be available for public comment. Bede indicated that Riverina Water are submitting their response and would include some comment from MDA Region 9, however there needs to be a response from MDA Region 9 with the concern raised by Brett Stonestreet. In short the following:

Will there be another document circulated in draft form with a short list of options that are costed, and that will then seek public comment, before a final document is published ?

8 GENERAL BUSINESS

With reference to the Leeton Shire Council feasibility Motion, Chair Andreazza noted that the Motion will be presented at the MDA Board Meeting tomorrow 18 March 2022.

Bede Spannagle raised the proposition of perhaps a pre-feasibility study as an alternative as that could be a better option as less cost and provide a guide as to whether to proceed to the next level of study.

Bede said that in particular the figures mentioned in the presentation today, in his view do not match the reality of water that could be transferred from Blowering Dam to Lake Coolah, e.g. firstly, recurring refill of 450 gL, may only occur one in 20 years, secondly the 900 gL is highly questionable. Chair Andreazza also mentioned that there would likely be issues around the water sharing plan and release of water.

CEO Mark Lamb suggested that the facts and figures regarding the basis of the Lake Coolah project must be robust and that there needs MDA agreement across the Board/Regions/Members.

Paul Maytom mentioned that at recent RAMJO meeting in Albury, the presentation by David Farley was endorsed. He added that all Shadow Ministers were to be included in the outgoing advice of the resolution to ensure that those Shadow Ministers are aware of the proposed project.

Paul Maytom welcomed CEO Mark Lamb to the position within MDA. Chair Glen Andreazza echoed those comments of welcome to Mark Lamb.

Bede Spannagle requested the option be available to those that wish to travel to the Region 9 meetings and appear in-person. Chair agreed with this and indicated that the Zoom option will also be available to those that do not wish/cannot attend in-person.

9. NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is to be held Third Thursday May, being 19 May 2022. That meeting will be open to all Members to attend in-person if they wish to do so. Otherwise a Zoom link will be made available to other Members.



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Nomads swoop on city

About 800 grey nomads have descended on Wagga for a week of music, games and camaraderie, as the hugely popular Stone the Crows Festival returns for the first time since 2019. The festival - aimed at those aged 50 and over - is a celebration of the adventurous spirit of those who spend some or all of their life on the road exploring the country.

Full story: Page 8



READY, SET, CROW: Organiser Grant Luhrs contemplates the return of the Stone the Crows Festival after a two-year hiatus. Picture: Les Smith

DAM PLANS

Water plan floats new dam to ease pressure of climate change

BY REX MARTINICH

A DRAFT management plan for the Murrumbidgee River has raised the possibility of building a new dam and upgrading existing storages in order to meet the region's water needs amid a changing climate.

The NSW Department of Planning and Environment has released its draft Murrumbidgee Regional Water Strategy as part of planning for the state's water needs over the next 20 to 40 years.

The draft strategy includes an option to investigate

building a new water storage at Lake Coolah-Mejum, about six kilometres north-east of Narrandera.

The lake and its nearby swamp have been repeatedly raised by Riverina councils over the past 10 years as a possible new dam location.

The draft also listed op-

tions for raising Blowering Dam by four metres, which would increase its capacity by 200 ggalitres - the equivalent to 12 per cent of current capacity - or enlarging the Burrinjuck Storage Reservoir.

The options were described as possible responses to the "limitations of existing

water infrastructure, delivery and operations", which were labelled by the strategy as one of the key challenges facing the region.

NSW Farmers Wagga branch president Alan Brown said he welcomed discussion of potential increases to water storage as it would lessen

the impact of droughts.

"We're looking at the effects of climate change, which is going to produce bigger variations in our rainfall," he said. "We have got to remove or mitigate the effects of climate change by storing more water."

Continued: Page 3

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Guilty plea over pub drugs

COURT

BY REX MARTINICH

A WAGGA man arrested during a crackdown on drug dealing in licensed venues has pleaded guilty to multiple charges, including one with a maximum penalty of 20 years' jail.

Trent MacDonald, aged 23, was arrested by police officers from Strike Force Crestreef on Wednesday night after they executed a search warrant on his Ashmont home.

Strike Force Crestreef was established in July last year by Riverina Police District's Proactive Crime Team, Criminal Investigation Unit and Licensing Office, to investigate the supply of cocaine and MDMA in licensed premises in the Wagga CBD.

MacDonald appeared in Wagga Local Court via video link on Thursday and pleaded guilty to nine charges, including supplying indictable and commercial quantities of cocaine, possessing a quantity of cocaine and possessing five grams of cannabis.

The charges MacDonald



SEARCH: Riverina Police District officers from Strike Force Crestreef arrest Trent MacDonald at his Ashmont home on Wednesday. Picture: NSW Police

admitted to included selling a total of 5.88 grams of cocaine in the rear toilets at his workplace in Wagga's Victoria Hotel and at his Ashmont home to an undercover person working with police.

MacDonald also admitted to the charge of supplying a prohibited drug other than cannabis on an ongoing basis, due his multiple cocaine sales within a span of 30 days, which carries a maximum penalty of 20 years in jail.

A police statement of facts said that MacDonald "used his position on staff at one of Wagga's busiest licensed premises to supply cocaine

and spruiked that his employment gave him opportunity to do so".

The NSW Police Force's Acting Assistant Commissioner granted Strike Force Crestreef permission to carry out a controlled operation, which allows authorised people to engage in specific unlawful activities as part of a police investigation.

An undercover person entered the Victoria Hotel three times between March 11 and April 7 and purchased a 1-gram bag of cocaine for \$350 on each occasion from MacDonald.

The bags tested positive for cocaine at purity levels of between 12.5 and 15.5 per cent.

An undercover person also contacted MacDonald via text message and arranged to purchase 3 grams of cocaine, which later showed a purity of 9.5 per cent, for \$1050 at his Ashmont home.

Some of MacDonald's conversations with the undercover person were covertly recorded.

The police prosecutor opposed bail prior to sentencing, telling the court that

MacDonald had breached a conditional release order.

"This was offending of an ongoing nature ... he used his employment to facilitate offending and there is nothing before the court to indicate that he would not continue to commit offences if granted bail," the prosecutor said.

"There is an unacceptable risk to the community."

MacDonald's solicitor said his client was facing serious charges but bail could be granted with appropriate conditions.

"He is a young man with only a limited prior involvement in criminal activities," the solicitor said.

Magistrate Christopher Halburd granted MacDonald bail.

"He boasted about using the access his employment gave him for the purpose of offending, however the police are well aware of it now," Magistrate Halburd said.

The matter was adjourned until June 7 for sentencing.

Three other people arrested and charged by Strike Force Crestreef on Wednesday are due to appear in court on June 29.

New dam option to fight climate change

From Page 1

The draft strategy did not include indicative budgets or schedules for any potential water storage projects at Blowering Dam, Burrinjuck Reservoir or Lake Coolah.

Mr Brown said another benefit to more storage would be to preserve heavy rainfall instead of sending excess water downstream.

"Storing more water is beneficial for both the environment and productivity," Mr Brown said. "There have been immense permanent plantings in the irrigation areas, which are going to re-

quire more water to remain productive.

"We need to store more water and also use it more wisely."

The draft strategy noted that Blowering and Burrinjuck dams already had a high potential for severe cold water pollution and that large releases of water with low oxygen levels damaged the environment for up to 300 kilometres downstream of where the Tumut and Murrumbidgee rivers meet.

"Cold water pollution disturbs the growth, breeding and survival of some native

fish, including Murray cod, freshwater catfish and other aquatic fauna," the strategy said.

NSW Lands and Water Minister Kevin Anderson said the strategy would put forward the best mix of solutions to address the region's water-related challenges.

"We will assess all options, including infrastructure, water recycling, improved water efficiency and policy and regulatory and operational changes," he said.

The draft Murrumbidgee Regional Water Strategy is on public exhibition and ac-

cepting feedback via written submissions until May 22.

Stakeholders will also be able to attend webinars or face-to-face consultation sessions and provide their feedback on the strategy, including at Mercure Wagga on Morgan Street on April 29 from 9am to 3pm.

Department of Planning and Environment executive director Kaia Hodges said the Murrumbidgee was an extremely complex river system and state-of-the-art hydrological modelling and climate data had been used in the draft strategy.



POTENTIAL: Lake Coolah, near Narrandera, could be used for a new water storage site under a NSW draft strategy for the Murrumbidgee River.



Dr Joe McGirr MP

INDEPENDENT MEMBER FOR WAGGA WAGGA

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