



Murray Darling Association Inc.

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ABN: 64 636 490 493

Minutes of a Meeting of Murrumbidgee Region of the Murray Darling Association held at the Wagga Wagga City Council on Friday 15 August 2014, commencing at 10.00am

MINUTES

1. Present

Cr Paul Maytom	Leeton Shire Council
Cr Gary Hiscock	Riverina Water, Wagga Wagga
Cr Greg Conkey	Wagga Wagga City Council
Mr Heinz Kausche	General Manager, Wagga Wagga City Council
Cr Paul Rossetto	Griffith City Council
Mr Bede Mecham	MDA Life Member, Wagga Wagga
Mr Bob Stewart	General Manager, Tumut Shire Council
Mr Paul Doyle	Murray-Darling Basin Authority
Mr Bede Spannagle	Riverina Water
Cr Mason Crane	Gundagai Shire Council
Mr Phillip McMurray	Gundagai Shire Council
Mr Mark Gooden	MDA member, Wagga Wagga
Mr Michael McCormack MHR	Member for Riverina
Mr Joe Burns	MDA member, Leeton
Mr John Foster	Commonwealth Environmental Water Office
Cr James Howard	Narrandera Shire Council
Mr Adrian Wells	Manager Upper Catchment, MDA
Ms Emma Bradbury	Interim Chief Executive Officer, MDA
Mr Phil Pinyon	General Manager, Wagga Wagga City Council
Cr Rod Kendal	Mayor, Wagga Wagga City Council
Cr Greg Toll	National President, MDA
Mr Chis Coombes	Wagga Wagga City Council

1.2 Apologies

Cr R Campbell; Cr P Cox, Mr D Maguire MP, Cr G Pritchard, Cr G Hallett, Mr A Drenovski, Mr M Glover

2. Welcome

Cr Rod Kendall, Mayor, Wagga Wagga City Council, welcomed the delegates to Wagga Wagga. Cr Paul Maytom, Chair of the Murrumbidgee Region, welcomed delegates to the meeting.

Cr Maytom gave a particular welcome to Michael McCormack MHR (recently returned from a visit to Afghanistan); Mr Phillip McMurray (the new General Manager of Gundagai Shire Council); and Ms Emma Bradbury, Interim Chief Executive Officer, MDA

3. Previous minutes

Moved J Burns seconded G Conkey that the minutes of the meeting held at the Griffith City Council, NSW, on Friday 28 March 2014, commencing at 10am (circulated in April 2014), be taken as read and confirmed.

4. Business Arising

4.1 Murrumbidgee Region funds

Several years ago, the balance of funds held by the Murrumbidgee Valley Water Users Association was transferred to the Murray Darling Foundation. The funds were to be used on a project suggested by the Murrumbidgee Region. The last region meeting resolved that the balance be placed in the Foundation's water bank trust account to purchase permanent water shares for environmental projects in the Murrumbidgee catchment, as long as the water is purchased from within the Murrumbidgee.

5. Reports

Reports from the following were circulated with the Region agenda:

- Cr Paul Maytom, Chairman, Murrumbidgee Region
- Mr Adrian Wells, Manager Upper Catchment
- Ms Emma Bradbury, Interim Chief Executive Officer

Moved P Rossetto seconded M Gooden that the reports be received.

6. Commonwealth Environmental water Holder – 11.00am

The Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder is now the largest holder of water in Australia and will have a key role in managing and delivering environmental watering as part of the Basin Plan. Mr John Foster attended the meeting to discuss management of environmental watering in the Murray-Darling Basin, with an emphasis on the Murrumbidgee catchment. In response to questions, John commented that:

- a CEWH local engagement officer will be appointed to Leeton during October 2014.
- CEWH is looking at various options to engage with the community and would welcome suggestions,
- CEWH is happy to consider proposals on how the community have access to and use environmental water.

7. Review of the Commonwealth Water Act

E Bradbury, the MDA's Interim CEO, discussed an MDA submission as part of the process to review the Commonwealth's Water Act (2007). The Association has now received invitations to participate in 'round table' discussions with the commonwealth to further review the Water Act. The MDA submission is on the association's website.

8. 2014 National Conference/AGM

The Association's 2014 National Conference and AGM will be held at Tumut in the Snowy Mountains from **14 to 16 October**. The Board has changed the dates slightly in response to a number of requests to make it a two-and-a-half day, not a three day, event. A summary of the program was circulated. The full program and registration forms are on the association's website. Hard copies of this material will be forwarded to member councils shortly.

9. Murray Darling Association's website

As part of her initial duties, the MDA's Interim CEO, Emma Bradbury, has been asked to update and upgrade the association's website to make it more contemporary and user-friendly. She is also looking for funding to assist with this process.

10. Resolutions for the AGM

The region put forward the following resolutions for the association's 2014 AGM agenda:

MOVED J Burns, seconded J Howard, that the MDA seeks changes to the current Commonwealth Water Act (2007) to allow proceeds from the temporary sale of environmental water held by the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder to be used to undertake maintenance, repairs, upgrade and new infrastructure works to effect savings in the delivery of environmental water within the Murray-Darling Basin.

MOVED J Burns, seconded J Howard, that the MDA seeks changes to the current Commonwealth Water Act (2007) so that at the end of each season, independent monitoring, evaluation and audit of the activities of the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder are undertaken and reported back to both the federal government and the basin community.

11. Voting procedures at the AGM

These are currently being reviewed by the MDA Board. The MDA has approached the Municipal Association of Victoria and several other organisations to explore modelling options before considering final proposals.

12. MOU with the Murray-Darling Basin Authority

Following meetings between the Murray-Darling Basin Authority and the Association, the association entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Authority. It has been broadly acknowledged that while the communication process with the regions identified some gaps in internal procedures, the content of the MOU is well regarded.

Moved J Burns seconded M Crane that the Murrumbidgee Region endorses the MOU as it currently stands.

13. Social and economic impacts data gathering project

The MDA is ready to start a project to collection of social and economic information from Local Government. The Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) is required to monitor the social and economic impacts and outcomes of the basin water reforms and has identified a number of social and economic indicators that need tracking and analysis over time. These include commodity price changes, seasonal weather conditions, employment, housing price data, population changes, rural land and community and business confidence. The authority recognises that there is considerable work already being done by councils across the basin in their local communities. The MDBA has engaged the MDA to start this data collection process. It is hoped that all Basin councils will work together on what will be a substantial effort of collecting and collating this information. Comments at the meeting included:

- councils are often swamped (weekly) with requests for this information,
- other groups often hold this information that they have already got from councils,
- need to assess what information is already available to ensue that effort is not wasted or duplicated,
- councils will want to know where their information finishes up and to whom it may be distributed,
- have to ensure that the process does not impose additional costs and resources on councils.

14. Murray Darling Foundation

All councils in the Murrumbidgee catchment have received information and application forms for a Local Government Travelling Bursary. The bursary offers environment or planning staff an opportunity to share and explore ideas, enhance and develop programs, and to encourage and support council work in land use and environmental management.

15. Michael McCormack

Michael McCormack MHR, gave a short report. His report included:

- managing water is not rocket science – it is far more difficult than that!
- has asked Senator Birmingham for water for Murrumbidgee rice crops in the next three weeks,
- need to better dovetail comments and concerns about mining exploration and coal seam gas with the states who have the final say on these issues,
- NSW appears to not be heeding the ‘pain’ of CSG exploration, despite its potential impacts on farmland and water supplies,
- the National Party has six key points in its policy on mining – these will be emailed to the MDA,
- we should not ignore the benefits that coal seam gas had brought to some regional communities despite strong initial opposition – have to strike a balance,
- want to see more of gas kept in Australia for our use,
- mining exploration should be limited to companies with a credible and sound history of exploration, not two dollar companies!

16. Wagga Wagga City Council

Mr Christopher Coombes from the Wagga Wagga City Council gave a presentation on the Tarcutta Street gasworks site remediation. This was a costly and ambitious project to rehabilitate this site to protect not only the health of the city’s residents, but also the health and water quality of the Murrumbidgee River.

17. Climate change forum

Region 1 is holding a public forum in Albury on 19 August to discuss climate change. The aim is to raise the level of public debate on this important issue, not to give any particular view but to bring together a range of views. The forum will be conducted in two half-day sessions. The morning session has been developed for councilors, school students and community members. An afternoon session is of a more technical nature and is for council staff, university, scientists and technical people. An invitation was extended to Murrumbidgee Region members to attend the sessions.

18. Coal seam gas mining

The Association’s Board has asked that all regions to discuss and seek further information on the benefits and risks associated with coal seam gas mining, exploration, and extraction methods including fracking. Comments included:

- no coal seam gas development should proceed where it poses any risk to the quality of ground water or surface water systems,
- no CSG development should occur in the absence of scientific evidence guaranteeing that the activity is safe for the environment;
- agricultural land is a vital and important asset and must be protected from any activities that compromises its productive capacities,
- ground water is a vital and important asset and must be protected from any activity that might compromise its quality,
- the Murrumbidgee Region position should not be in any way political, or supportive of the views of any one party or position over another, but should focus on the environment and local communities.

19. Region secretary

The MDA regions are moving to a model of operation that encourages the practice of a minute secretary for region meetings being provided by a participating member council. The objective is to ensure a consistency in taking minutes across all regions, and to release the Upper Catchment Manager from tasks outside of his position description. The manager has also expressed a desire to retire from the manager's position and only work part-time on projects.

In some regions, the host councils are providing a minute secretary to take minutes within a provided minute framework. While region 9 expressed some hesitation to change, it was acknowledged that the management of staff is an operational matter and the issue will be given further consideration.

20. Next Meeting

The next meeting for the Murrumbidgee Region will be held in November 2014 at venue and date to be confirmed.

21. Close

The meeting concluded at 1.20pm.

***The Murray Darling Association acknowledges and thanks
Wagga Wagga City Council for hosting this meeting of the Murrumbidgee Region***