



# 78<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting

## AGENDA

**Time: 3:30pm**

**Date: Wednesday, 21 September 2022**

**Location: Albury Entertainment Centre, 525 Swift Street, Albury NSW**

**Murray Darling Association Incorporated**  
ABN 64 636 490 493

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## Zoom Meeting Log in Details

[ZOOM LINK](#) (Meeting ID 882 9370 6339)

## 1. Welcome

### 1.1 Welcome Address

Cr David Thurley, OAM

*MDA National President*

## 2. Attendance

### 2.1 Present

### 2.2 Apologies

### 2.3 Declarations of Interest

## 3. Confirmation of Previous Minutes

Refer to Attachment 3

**Recommendation:**

That the minutes of 77<sup>th</sup> MDA Annual General Meeting held on 19 May 2021 be accepted as an accurate record.

## 4. 2021 - 2022 Annual Report and Financial Statements

Refer to Attachment 4

**Recommendation:**

That the 2021 – 2022 Annual report and Financial Statements for the year ending 31 March 2021 be received and noted.

## 5. Life Member Nomination – Paul Maytom

Refer to Attachment 5

**Recommendation:**

That the Life Membership nomination for Paul Maytom, former Region 9 Chair be approved.

## 6. Motions on Notice

### Motion 6.1 ENVIRONMENTAL WATER ACCOUNT

*Mildura Rural City Council, Region 4*

#### Recommendation:

**That the Murray Darling Association commend the Federal Government, the Basin States, and the Murray-Darling Basin Authority to make a commitment based on science to increase the volume of water in the environmental account. With the intent of rejuvenating the health of waterways in Murray Darling Barka Basin in the driest and drought years. Considering system intake variability ephemerality and climate change.**

#### Objective:

To open discussion on the extraordinary growth of water reliant crops in the Murray Darling Barka Basin. To critique this growth following the intent of the Water Act of 2007 and its premise to protect, preserve, and rejuvenate the waterways in the Murray Darling Barka Basin.

An overall environmental and ecological benefit would initially occur. Community and amenity benefit with an overall goal of sustainable waterways coexisting with healthy working Rivers and sustainable horticulture and agriculture.

#### Key Arguments:

##### ***What is the current context/issue?***

From 1997 to 2018, the irrigable area in the Mallee catchment increased by 40,825 hectares, from 40,325 hectares to 81,150 hectares. The pace of development has continued to increase since this report was completed. **In 2000, Australia had approximately 3,546 hectares (ha) of almond tree plantations. By 2019, the rapid expansion of this industry had increased almond-growing land to 53,014 ha – a 900% rise in less than 20 years.**

The fact that much of this expansion has occurred in a short time, particularly within the highly compromised Murray–Darling Basin, invites questions about the water needs of permanent plantings and their role in the multiple pressures on inland water and the environment in Australia more widely.

The underlying need for a reliable supply of water sees permanent plantings along river systems facing increasing pressure from prolonged dry periods despite their substantial water requirements in a geographical area with severe and catastrophic water security issues.

The unbundling of land from water has generated an explosion of development in the River Systems and on flood plains. This has generated a Goldrush/Water rush mentality and has presented multiple challenges. There has been an ongoing drain on this scarce resource which requires a commitment to find solutions based in science.

An example of the politicized nature of decisions made without scientific scrutiny in the Basin can be explored in the 2018 Northern Basin Review. The 2018 Amendment by Federal Government,

supported by the opposition reduced the water recovery target in the Northern Connected Basin from 390GL to 370GL. [Northern Disclosure - The Australia Institute](#) .

##### ***What are the risks of this motion doesn't get up?***

With the Rivers full from a few wet years Developers and investors overlook the destruction the millennial drought and previous droughts delivered to the Basin. With investors stalking the water market for its huge returns the Water Sector must collectively assess the risks existing through accelerated developments and diminishing intakes. The Millennium drought is a stark reminder of the ephemerality of the River's in the Murray Darling Barka Basin.

## Motion 6.2 MORATORIUM ON AGRICULTURAL & HORTICULTURAL DEVELOPMENTS

*Mildura Rural City Council, Region 4*

### **Recommendation:**

**That the Murray Darling Association call on the Federal, State, and Municipal governments to introduce a moratorium on new agricultural and horticultural Developments. A Consideration of the capacity to develop new agricultural and horticultural land in The Murray Darling Barka Basin is an essential step in ensuring sustainability. A moratorium would assess the multiplicity of factors overlaid on the basin, including inflows, markets, politics, climate change and river system regeneration.**

### **Objective:**

This motion seeks to bring attention to the exponential growth in permanent and perennial developments in the Murray Darling Barka Basin and the system's ability to manage another millennium drought. It also deals with the volume of water needed to service all new development and developments which have not reached full production in dry and drought years.

### **Key Arguments:**

There would be an overall environmental and ecological benefit initially, then community and amenity benefit with the overall goal of sustainable waterways coexisting with healthy working Rivers and sustainable horticulture and agriculture.

#### ***What is the current context/issue?***

The rapid increase in horticulture and agriculture is putting direct pressure on water supply and system management. The scarcity of water and diminishing intakes through drought and climate change has put a drain on the security of access and allocation for Horticulture Agriculture and Environment requirements equally. An assessment based in science of these overlapping concerns would aid managing future droughts.

#### ***What are the risks of this motion doesn't get up?***

Environment and ecological disaster and the reduction of farming in Australia. The desertion of towns and villages which rely on healthy connected Rivers with flow, connectivity, and people.

#### ***What is the broader benefit to Basin communities if this motion is successful?***

A healthy sustainable Murray Darling Barka Basin with a return of natural ecological landscapes and sustainable farming practices

## Motion 6.3 MENINDEE LAKES – RAMSAR SITE

*Mildura Rural City Council, Region 4*

### **Recommendation:**

#### **That the Murray Darling Association:**

- 1. Call on Basin Governments to support further exploration of the listing of the Menindee Lakes as a Ramsar site. The Menindee Lakes are a refuge for people, fish, frogs, flora, and fauna.**
- 2. Write to the relevant Federal and State Ministers seeking support in prioritizing the Menindee Lakes as a Ramsar site.**

### **Objective:**

To preserve the environmental and ecological integrity of the Menindee Lakes system and the Lower Darling Barka for communities and First Peoples. To ensure there are unregulated lengths of wild river to enhance native fish breeding through floods big medium and small.

### **Key Arguments:**

The benefit would be on many levels. To community, first peoples, the environment, removing the stress of dry Lakes and Lower Darling Barka Fish kills. To reverse system decline and address the decline in native fish numbers, less than 10% of native fish inhabit Basin rivers.

#### ***What is the current context/issue?***

With Menindee Lakes full the positives are easily seen and recorded. Now is the time to ensure protection of this unique site and its central link between the Northern and Southern Connected Basins.

#### ***What are the risks of this motion doesn't get up?***

There is a risk that after the wet period the pressure on the Menindee Lakes and Lower Darling Barka will return with even greater ecological damage.

#### ***What is the broader benefit to Basin communities if this motion is successful?***

Benefit of this motion is to guarantee flow and connectivity along the Barwon/Darling Barka Rivers. To support First People and Communities.

## Motion 6.4 FLOODPLAIN HARVESTING VOLUME CAP

*Wentworth Shire Council, Mildura Rural City Council, Region 4*

### Recommendation:

**That the Murray Darling Association call on Basin Governments to legislate the volume of floodplain harvesting to the 1995 Cap for the protection and environmental integrity of Northern NSW, Southern Queensland Rivers, and Barwon Darling Barka Rivers.**

### Objective:

This motion is endeavouring to protect the environmental, ecological, social integrity of the lands and communities along the Rivers where unregulated floodplain harvesting has led to and exacerbated unprecedented low rivers and drought.

### Key Arguments:

The communities' lands and first peoples along the River Systems in the Murray Darling Barka Basin would benefit from a healthy reliable access to water and its amenity.

#### ***What is the current context/issue?***

There is a belief, matched by the unprecedented development since the Water Act was implemented in 2007, that ongoing growth and extraction is possible. This belief is bolstered through multiple wet years. A consideration of the risks already existing needs assessment because of the variability and ephemerality in Australian Rivers. A deeper engagement with outcomes of Climate Change is a necessary consideration if water intakes into the system become even more variable.

Recently the NSW ICAC called out the failure of water policy in NSW as being "unruly focused on the interests of the irrigation industry" over the rights of other users. Without intervention this unacceptable situation will continue.

Troy Grant Inspector General of Water Compliance Stated at the MDBA River Reflections forum in Mildura on the 2 of June this Year. NSW's level of accountability under the Basin Plan is not equal to that of other Basin states and the territory, each of which have accredited WRPs.

#### ***What are the risks of this motion doesn't get up?***

The risks are that the water sector will again ignore multiple volumes of evidence proving mismanagement, single mindedness, and lack of engagement. The sector must intervene and not let an amoral market dictate what a finite connected system can endure through unprecedented growth and the looming reality of climate change.

#### ***What is the broader benefit to Basin communities if this motion is successful?***

To ensure there is a balanced view within the Basin Rivers. Considering sustainable horticulture and agriculture, flow and connectivity within the system and a deeper engagement with climate change and climate mitigation.

## Motion 6.5 DRAFT WESTERN REGIONAL WATER STRATEGY CONSULTATION

*Broken Hill City Council, Central Darling Shire Council, Wentworth Shire Council, Region 4*

### Recommendation:

That the Murray Darling Association:

- a) Express the disappointment and dismay of its Region 4 members that public consultation of the Draft Western Regional Water Strategy failed to adequately consult the river communities of the Lower Darling Barka; and that it has just recently been purported in media that Ministerial approval of the Draft Strategy has been given whilst public consultation was still ongoing and before the department had reported its findings.
- b) Call for an amendment to the NSW Department of Planning, Industry & Environment's Western Regional Water Strategy to increase the critical dry conditions trigger for the Menindee Lakes System from 195GL of total storage across all Lakes - to 480GL of total storage in Lakes Wetherell and Pamamaroo only, which will guarantee an accessible 12 month quality water supply for critical environmental and human needs for river communities and First Nations lands of the Lower Darling-Barka.

### Objective:

This motion to amend the Western Regional Water Strategy is endeavouring to protect the environmental, ecological, social integrity of First Nations lands and communities of the Lower Darling Barka and the Menindee Lakes System during periods of drought to ensure an accessible quality water supply for critical environmental and human needs for townships whose only permanent water supply is provided by the Lakes; and to prevent a recurrence of the previous devastation caused by unregulated floodplain harvesting in the Upper Darling-Barka and its tributaries which exacerbated unprecedented low rivers, drought and destruction of the river's ecosystems in the Lower Darling-Barka and Menindee Lakes System.

The objective of this motion is also to provide connectivity of the Darling-Barka and Murray Rivers to ensure a healthy river system for all.

### Key Arguments:

A critical dry conditions trigger of 195 GL of total storage across all lakes at the Menindee Lakes System is inadequate and will not guarantee a 12 month water supply for the river communities of the Lower Darling-Barka or prevent a recurrence of the previous ecological disaster.

#### ***What is the current context/issue?***

Support for the 640GL/480GL rule of the Murray Darling Basin Plan for management of the Menindee Lakes System, on the basis, when management returns to NSW control, the 480GL is held in Lakes Pamamaroo and Wetherell and excludes any dead water component, with the primary goal to ensure the connectivity of the Darling and Murray Rivers and to meet critical environmental and human needs.

Dead water and undeliverable water should not be accounted for in the equation, i.e. when storage recedes there remains approximately 30GL of dead storage in Lake Pamamaroo, and a lesser amount of dead storage in Lake Wetherell that cannot be accessed.

During the peak of the drought in 2017/2018, 480GL of water was stored across all Lakes- being approximately 170GL of water stored in Lakes Cawndilla and Menindee (that became dead storage as it couldn't be accessed) and 310 in Lakes Pamamaroo and Wetherell (which also included a smaller amount of dead storage as mentioned above). This amount of water storage across all Lakes led to the destruction of the Lakes ecosystems .

If 480GL spread across all Lakes in 2017/2018 wasn't enough to prevent an ecological disaster, then how can 195GL spread across all Lakes be enough to prevent the same disaster happening again?

The use of Lake Pamamaroo and Lake Wetherell for storage being the preferred option, as opposed to all the Lakes, is due to these two lakes being the deepest lakes in the Menindee Lakes System thus providing the best chance to sustain the water quality during the summer months and ensuring the



least amount of evaporation. The proposal of 195GL supported by Water NSW was modelled on all water being held in Lake Wetherell.

The critical environmental needs of the First Nations lands and the critical human needs of river communities whose only source of a permanent water supply comes from the Lower Darling-Barka and Menindee Lakes System, should be the principal consideration in all State Water Strategies and Water Sharing Plans in order that a quality water supply remains in the Menindee Lakes System during times of dry rivers and drought.

***What are the risks of this motion doesn't get up?***

If the critical dry conditions trigger of 195GL of total storage across all lakes in the Menindee Lakes System is not amended in the newly approved Western Regional Water Strategy, the quality of the water will deteriorate at a faster rate due to a larger surface volume of shallow water susceptible to a higher rate of evaporation, higher resultant salinity levels and algal blooms due to increased water temperatures during summer months. Shallow water across all the Lakes will also result in an increased amount of "dead water" unable to be accessed.

As a result, the river communities will experience a recurrence of the ecological disaster of 2017/2018 when management of the Lakes returned to NSW control, namely:

Economic loss to the region due to a decrease in tourism to the Menindee Lakes System and townships (the area has received significant visitation since the refilling of the Lakes and this has provided a significant economic and social boost to the communities).

Indigenous communities were unable to continue cultural practices that have been a part of their lives for generations, due to a lack of cultural flows. This has severely impacted the mental health of many and not just our Aboriginal population in the community and has had dire consequences and anecdotally it is believed it has triggered suicide (water and the connection to it are an important part of Aboriginal cultural identity and quality of life).

A return of health conditions associated with poor water quality which was the cause of skin disease in children of the Central Darling and Wentworth Shires. Poor water quality activated a huge humanitarian effort in the donation and freight of bottled water to residents of the townships of Menindee and Wilcannia. These donations came from Broken Hill and South Australia.

Long-term changes to the Lakes natural ecology including erosion, changing water temperatures, removal of habitat for fish breeding, reduced supply of organic material and nutrients, a reduced water quality and a build-up of salt, has all contributed to outbreaks of blue-green algae and mass fish kills. The Barwon-Darling contains important environmental assets. For example, at least four resident fish species are listed under the NSW Fisheries Management Act 1994. The 'Lowland Darling River aquatic endangered ecological community' is also listed under the same NSW Act. Additionally, Murray cod and silver perch are listed on the International Union for the Conservation of Nature red list of threatened species, and also listed under the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999.

Changes to environmental processes of the Menindee Lakes System has ultimately restructured the food supply, therefore either resulting in the death or migration of water birds and native animals leading to further changes to the natural ecological systems. The Barwon-Darling River is a "dryland river", which means it is naturally prone to periods of extensive low flow punctuated by periods of flooding. The presence of Murray Cod who are the sentinels of permanent waterholes tells us that deliverable water must be maintained in the Lakes to ensure that this species and others can survive the dry non-flow periods.

***What is the broader benefit to Basin communities if this motion is successful?***

To provide connectivity of the Darling-Barka and Murray Rivers to ensure the health of the whole river system, its eco-systems, its First Nations lands and river communities.

## Motion 6.6 EFFECTS OF SEA-LEVEL RISE

*Coorong District Council, Region 6*

### **Recommendation:**

**That the Murray Darling Association requests that the Murray Darling Basin Authority encompass the effects of sea-level rise on the lower Murray River, Lakes and Coorong in their Climate Change research for inclusion in the 2026 Murray Darling Basin Review Report and the updated MDB Plan.**

### **Objective:**

Since the Millennium drought and the creation of the Murray Darling Basin Plan, many academic studies and reports have been published on the Basin, including the effects of Climate Change. The studies on the lower Murray River, its lakes, the Coorong and the Murray Mouth have referenced separate academic studies on climate change and the resultant sea-level rise. They also acknowledge the flooding of the barrier islands at the Murray Mouth with seawater that bypasses the present barrage system and permeates the lakes.

However, these reports have always been restricted by their Terms of Reference to being centric to their point of interest, generally environmental and RAMSAR. As such, although they recognise the likelihood of the Barrage system no-longer being effective in preventing seawater entering the lakes, the reports do not address the socio-economic effects on South Australia of seawater travelling upriver, as down river flows are reduced due to climate change.

Further unlimited research needs to be undertaken. It is crucial this is acknowledged and all research is included in the next Outlook report because of its importance, particularly for the Lower Murray Communities.

The CSIRO acknowledged that by 2050-60, the average annual stream flows in the Basin could be reduced by 20 to 30% due to climate change. In fact, we are experiencing worse than this in recent drought years with record low inflows. Reduced rainfall, higher evaporation and plant transpiration are addressed; however, there appears to be no acknowledgment of the consequential effects of Sea-Level Rise as the river flow to the sea diminishes. If the rising sea level is encompassed by increasing drought the consequences for saline inflow into the basin are enormous.

This motion intends to get the MDBA and Governments to acknowledge the consequence of allowing seawater to penetrate the Murray River and the domino, socio-economic effects this would bring to riparian communities and communities of South Australia, reliant on waters below Blanchetown.

e.g. Domestic water for SA Mid-north and Yorke Peninsula (Figure 1)- Swan Reach pipeline; greater Adelaide dependent on the Mannum & Murray Bridge pipelines; SA Upper South-East, dependent on the Tailm Bend to Keith pipeline; the Wine Districts of the Barossa, Clare and Langhorne Creek.

### ***Who would benefit from this motion?***

All communities that are reliant upon the freshwaters of the Murray River below Blanchetown would be decimated by the inundation of seawater into the river system.

### **Key Arguments:**

#### ***What is the current context/issue?***

The MDBA collects data from a number of sources for inclusion in the Outlook Report and various other Reports. Sources of data include:

- river operators
- the science community
- independent advisors
- various reviews, which included significant community, First Nations and other stakeholder input
- Australian Government and Basin state and territory governments.

The MDBA has built in several independent check points to validate results and ensure that the Evaluation is a comprehensive assessment of implementation progress and outcomes at the Basin scale. The Evaluation examines and publishes available environmental, social and economic research to provide practical actions to guide the journey of continuous improvement

However there appears to be no scientific study available that specifically has addressed the socio-economic effects on the larger portion of South Australia's population caused by the lower River Murray being inundated by seawater.

The Government scientifically acknowledges climate Change and rising sea levels.

In 2016, the National Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility modelled that by 2050, sea-level rise at the Murray Mouth would reach 1.2 m above mean sea level or AHD. At this level, seawater will flood across the low-lying islands at the Murray Mouth, bypassing the barrage system unabated and entering the Lower Lakes and the River Murray. It is further predicted that this inundation would achieve 1.62 m AHD by 2100, not only threatening the local ecology in the Coorong and Lower Lakes, the salinity level of the river below Blanchetown and the consequential impact on those communities reliant upon that water supply but in some areas, isolating road access. Dr Chiew et.al. confirm similar rises by 2100 in his team's 2020 review of the Lower Lakes science.

**What are the risks of this motion doesn't get up?**

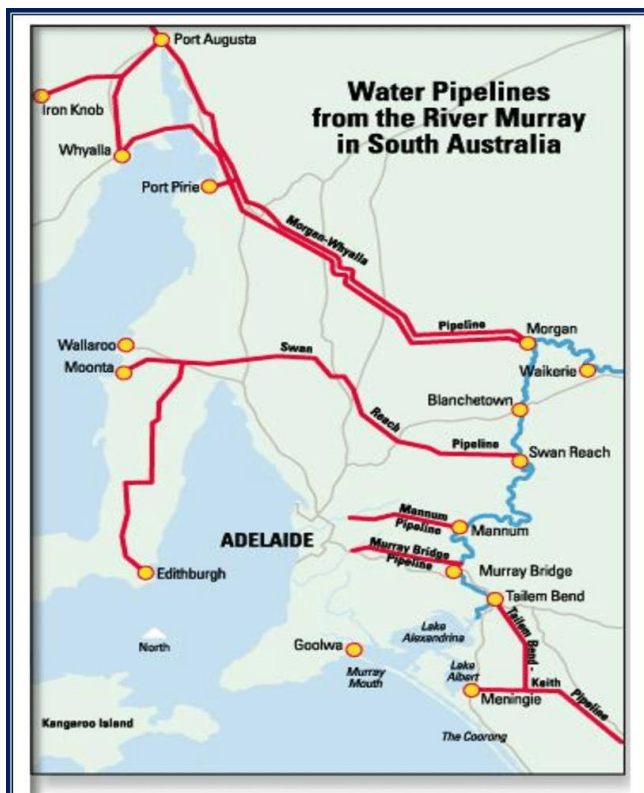
If the Government, its Basin States and the Murray Darling Basin Authority do not acknowledge and work towards the mitigation of Sea-Level Rise by 2030 the pool level of saline water below Blanchetown, weir 1, could reach 1.62m by 2100 and continue to rise. The Blanchetown weir holds the river at a maximum of 3.3m AHD Pool height.

What are the ramifications to communities when the sea level exceeds river level?

**What is the broader benefit to Basin communities if this motion is successful?**

The Federal Government needs to recognise and respond to the threats posed by rising sea levels v. reduced downriver flows (drought) due to climate change and mitigate those threats.

Figure 1. S.A. Murray River Pipelines. Source: Discover Murray River, 2014



REFERENCE:

- Effect of Sea-Level Rise on Alexandrina Council, Murray Mouth and its barrier Islands 2050 -2100 - [https://coastadapt.com.au/sea-level-rise-information-all-australian-coastal-councils#SA\\_ALEXANDRINA](https://coastadapt.com.au/sea-level-rise-information-all-australian-coastal-councils#SA_ALEXANDRINA)
- History and Review of Lower Lakes Science (p.10) - Dr Chiew et.al. 2020 <https://www.mdba.gov.au/sites/>
- Murray Darling Water and Environment Research <https://getinvolved.mdba.gov.au/murray-darling-water-and-environment-research-program>

## Motion 6.7 GREATER FIRST NATIONS INVOLVEMENT

Region 6

### Recommendation:

- a) That the MDA calls upon Member Councils of the Association to consider the assignment of Traditional names for dual-naming of locations within their district; and
- b) That all Member Councils, in consultation with Traditional Owners, consider the inclusion of local, Traditional place names as well as non-Aboriginal place names and translations on all replacement signs in their district.
- c) That the MDA calls upon the State Governments to ensure appropriate funding is allowed in each financial year for the inclusion of these names to replacement and new signs. d) The MDA calls upon the Federal and State Governments to ensure greater awareness of Traditional Culture is offered in regional school curriculum.

### Objective:

#### ***What is this motion trying to achieve?***

Greater involvement by First Nations into the management of the MDB.

#### ***Who would benefit from this motion?***

These actions would demonstrate reconciliation towards First nations across the MDB acknowledging their lands, waters, environment, and communities across the MDB.

### Key Arguments:

#### ***What is the current context/issue?***

Indigenous cultures have over 60,000 years of connection to country and understanding of the importance of responsible water use.

Greater cultural integration will allow indigenous nations to teach the connection to country to all people, therefore supporting our nations to all be more responsible for water use.

#### ***What are the risks of this motion doesn't get up?***

Less cultural integration and less responsible water use.

#### ***What is the broader benefit to Basin communities if this motion is successful?***

Enhanced reconciliation and communities jointly working together for the benefit of our shared lands and waters.

This Motion is supported by the Naranjeri Regional Authority (NRA).

## Motion 6.8 PROGRESS REPORTING ON THE 450GL RECOVERY PROGRAM

Region 6

### Recommendation:

**That the Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) or the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water publishes clear, simple, timely, and accurate reporting to show progress on the delivery of the 450 GL Recovery Programs.**

### Objective:

#### ***What is this motion trying to achieve?***

To provide current, accurate, clear, precise, and simple to follow, updates from all jurisdictions to show the progress in Water Efficiency Measures projects.

#### Background

The Basin Plan includes a provision for up to 450 GL/y additional water recovery separate from the gap-bridging target. This is for enhanced environmental outcomes on the condition that there are neutral or positive socio-economic impacts from the water recovery.

According to the former Department of Agriculture, Water and Environment website, 426.1 GL/y remains to be found, with no reporting or certainty on achieving when, where or how this water.

#### ***Who would benefit from this motion?***

Basin Communities and the Environment. Upfront and verified data on the progress of these projects gives all Regions confidence in the Basin Plan, the regional and State Plans and the ability to meet the targets set.

### Key Arguments:

#### ***What is the current context/issue?***

This motion intends to find and report on the progress of the Water Efficiency Measures projects to meet the target of 450 GL/y.

Apart from the publication of the Second Review of the Water for the Environment Special Account: December 2021 for the Commonwealth Minister for Water Resources, no other timely or current reporting on this issue is available.

There are numerous pages on both websites describing efficiency measures generally, with no links to state plans and the efficiency projects and how much water is planned to be recovered or recovered to date. Both sites refer to each other for more information as well as to State Government websites, which also do not provide detailed plans or results. A comprehensive report is, however, available on the completion of the savings from South Australia.

The lack of progress in meeting the 450 GL/y is compounded by the limited information available about the plans and progress.

#### ***What are the risks of this motion doesn't get up?***

That reporting and progress will continue to be poor.

#### ***What is the broader benefit to Basin communities if this motion is successful?***

Increased confidence in the reporting mechanism of the Murray Darling Basin Authority and Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water to deliver on the Basin Plan.

## Motion 6.9 NSW WATER RESOURCE PLANS

Region 6

### Recommendation:

**That the MDA call on the Australian Water Minister to set final submission dates and apply Section 68 of the Water Act 2007 for the Murray Darling Basin Authority to prepare and approve the New South Wales Water Resource Plans as required by the Murray Darling Basin Plan, in line with all other Basin States and Territories.**

### Objective:

#### *What is this motion trying to achieve?*

For the Water Minister to request the MDBA to prepare all outstanding NSW Water Resource Plans for approval by the Minister to deliver the outcomes of the MDBP. This will ensure that the environment, human needs, industrial, agricultural, cultural, native title, town water supply and stock and domestic needs of riparian landowners along the length of the river are provided for, as a priority, during extended dry periods.

#### Background:

NSW is three years behind the second deadline set by the Australian Government for the completion and approval of the Water Resource Plans required to deliver the agreed outcomes of the Murray Darling Basin Plan. Without these plans, the promised water cannot be delivered and the industrial, human and environmental components of the MDB will suffer further. These plans are legislated to be implemented by 2024.

The Australian Government Water Minister is empowered within the Water Act 2007, Section 68[1] to request the MDBA to prepare Water Resource Plans upon meeting particular conditions, such as where no current or temporary Water Resource Plan exists.

#### *Who would benefit from this motion?*

All Basin Communities and the Environment.

### Key Arguments:

Queensland, Victoria, South Australia, and the Australian Capital Territory completed their Water Recovery Plans according to the timeline established in the Murray Darling Basin Plan, however, NSW is progressing very slowly, putting the MDB Plan in jeopardy.

#### *What is the current context/issue?*

No WRP's are in place across NSW since legislated to be completed 10 years ago. Every state, and the territory, had seven years to build these plans. They were due to start in 2019 and already, they are three years overdue from being finalised.

The Basin Plan requires a WRP to set out the method for determining the maximum quantity of water permitted to be taken for consumptive use in each accounting period. The WRP also establishes the method for determining the annual actual take.

Accredited WRPs are required to enable compliance and enforcement, and those plans also ensure the following:

- i. The limits on how much water can be taken from the system and that water takes are maintained
- ii. That water will be made available to the environment
- iii. Consideration for cultural values and uses; and finally,
- iv. Water quality targets are managed.[2]

***What are the risks of this motion doesn't get up?***

That the MDB Plan will fail to provide water to all communities, particularly in drought years and increasing threats under the influence of Climate Change. That by failing to produce the required plans, NSW cannot be audited or can be taking more water than entitled without consequences.

***What is the broader benefit to Basin communities if this motion is successful?***

Fairness and equity across the Basin, an equal playing field between states and territories, more water for all, and a resilient River system.

## Motion 6.10 CIRCULAR ECONOMIC PROJECT FUNDING

Region 6

### Recommendation:

**That the MDA advocate to basin governments for funding for circular economic projects that include drawing down carbon, and mitigating and adapting to climate change.**

### Objective:

#### ***What is this motion trying to achieve?***

Supporting regional local governments to have access to information and technology that will allow circular economic projects that encompass waste to energy, increased economic improvement in towns, carbon drawdown, renewable energy, and water savings and hence enhanced economic viability to the region.

At the national MDA conference in 2022, several circular economic projects that encompass water savings are being presented.

#### ***Who would benefit from this motion?***

Some projects may invariably improve soil water holding capacity an opportunity that could be considered by governments in water-saving plans.

Regional communities may also be able to claim carbon credits if they are doing projects that draw down carbon.

Regional communities will benefit economically from implementing these projects in regional towns.

### Key Arguments:

#### ***What is the current context/issue?***

The MDA is currently working with the CSIRO on the opportunities and barriers to circular economic projects in regional towns. There are many opportunities for circular economic projects in regional towns.

Regional towns need education on the benefits of the circular economic project. Elected members and administration of councils should be briefed on their potential and implement resources to research possible projects for each MDB council region.

#### ***What are the risks of this motion doesn't get up?***

That towns along the MDB will not have the opportunity to benefit economically and also less opportunity for drought and climate change mitigation.

#### ***What is the broader benefit to Basin communities if this motion is successful?***

The projects will benefit the economic viability of towns and may include strategies that support drought resilience, and adaptation and mitigation of climate change.



## Motion 6.11 CLARIFICATION OF ANNUAL WATER ALLOCATION METHODOLOGY

Region 9

### Recommendation:

That the Murray Darling Association write to the NSW Minister for Water seeking clarification as to the methodology used to determine annual water allocations in NSW and variations to these allocations during the year. The timing of these water allocation decisions and adjustments are not currently aligned with critical business investment decisions made by the diverse agricultural sector.

### Objective:

#### ***What is this motion trying to achieve?***

To achieve transparency and an understanding in water allocations and gauge some surety for agricultural investment decisions.

#### ***Who would benefit from this motion?***

The whole region including the triple bottom line framework of economic, social, and environmental considerations.

### Key Arguments:

At the MDA Region 9 Meeting on Thursday 8 September, the following Resolution was carried following a Motion by Mayor Ruth McRae, Murrumbidgee Council and Seconded by Cr Geoff Chapman, Hay Shire Council.

#### ***What is the current context/issue?***

Concerned local government areas that rely on water allocations.

#### ***What are the risks of this motion doesn't get up?***

There will continue to be a lack of transparency in terms of water allocation decisions and perpetuate negative impacts on communities.

#### ***What is the broader benefit to Basin communities if this motion is successful?***

Clarification in the methodology would bring about an understanding of water allocation decision making.

## **Motion 6.12 “BENEFIT COST RATIO” REQUIREMENTS**

***Region 11***

**Recommendation:**

**That the MDA call on the Commonwealth Government and the basin State Governments to remove the requirements for a “Benefit Cost Ratio” (BCR) greater than one to be applied to funding applications for water storage projects such, as but not limited to; New dam construction and raising the height of existing dam walls.**

**Objective:**

That the MDA call on the Commonwealth Government and the basin State Governments to remove the requirements for a “Benefit Cost Ratio” (BCR) greater than one to be applied to funding applications for water storage projects such, as but not limited to; New dam construction and raising the height of existing dam walls.

## Motion 6.13 OWNERSHIP AND ACCESS TO WATER FOR CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC PURPOSES FOR THE BASIN'S INDIGENOUS NATIONS

Region 6

### Recommendation:

That the MDA support the provision of water for cultural and economic purposes for Indigenous Nations of the Murray Darling Basin (MDB).

The MDA support the Commonwealth and all Basin jurisdictions (including their relevant statutory authorities and/or agencies) to:

- (1) Work collaboratively with Nations to waive annual entitlement holding and use fees for groundwater and surface water shares and,
- (2) Commit to appropriately resourcing the Basin's indigenous Nations (either directly or via a Nation's preferred body) to enable relevant First Nations led research including, but not limited to, legislative and policy reform to achieve cultural flows Nations within the MDB.

### Objective:

#### *What is this motion trying to achieve?*

Restorative water justice for Indigenous Nations within the Basin via the provision of cultural flows, first articulated in the Echuca Declaration (2007). Cultural flows are water entitlements that are legally and beneficially owned by First Nations.

#### *Who would benefit from this motion?*

Indigenous Nations across the MDB as well as the environment and communities across the MDB. Recreation, Indigenous-agriculture, and tourism-related sectors are likely to grow as a result of this proposed initiative. Australia would also be upholding the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)(endorsed in 2009).

MILDRN and NRA are in support of this Motion.

### Key Arguments:

#### *What is the current context/issue?*

Since colonisation, First Nations across the MDB have endured multiple waves of water dispossession. More recently, dispossession has been exacerbated by the separation of land and water and the subsequent creation of tradable water rights. Put simply, First Nations are at a profound disadvantage in a market-based system that requires considerable capital to purchase even a modest quantity of water.

First Nations own 0.022% of available groundwater resources across the MDB and 0.2% of available surface water in the NSW part of the Basin. Commitments by the Australian and Basin State governments to progress First Nations' objectives for water are supported by international declarations and conventions. Australia has endorsed UNDRIP and is a signatory to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands.

The UNDRIP states that First Nations people have rights to own, use and develop waters that they traditionally owned. Australia currently has 66 Wetlands of International Importance listed under the Ramsar Convention, and 16 of these are in the Murray-Darling Basin. The Ramsar Convention has long promoted the recognition and strengthening of First Nations peoples as key participants in conservation and integrated wetland management (see Target 10 of Goal 3: Wisely Using All Wetlands, of the Ramsar Strategic Plan 2016-2024).

#### *What are the risks of this motion doesn't get up?*

Maintenance of the status quo i.e., Indigenous Nations within the Basin without cultural flows. Ongoing criticism of Federal and State governments in failing to deliver water (justice) to indigenous Nations. Damage to Australia's good international standing in consideration of UNDRIP.

***What is the broader benefit to Basin communities if this motion is successful?***

Resolution of a long-standing social, political and economic injustice and, as a result of empowered Basin Indigenous Nations. This would be a watershed moment in realizing significantly improved environmental, economic and social outcome

REFERENCES

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13241583.2021.1970094>

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/07900627.2020.1868980>

[https://www.mdba.gov.au/sites/default/files/pubs/sa-mldrin-echuca-declaration\[1\]](https://www.mdba.gov.au/sites/default/files/pubs/sa-mldrin-echuca-declaration[1]) .

**Recommendation:**

**MDA support and advocate for exploring the potential for managed aquifer recharge (MAR) to contribute to efficient water management and increase regional water security throughout the Basin.**

**Objective:**

1. Quantify the savings through efficiencies and increases to water security that could be realised through strategic MAR for drought resilience.
2. Develop appropriate policy, accounting and regulatory frameworks that enable MAR to be implemented fairly and transparently.
3. Establish well documented demonstration MAR sites in the MDB.

**Key Arguments:*****What is the current context/issue?***

Managed aquifer recharge, or MAR, refers to the intentional recharge of water to aquifers for subsequent use or environmental benefit.

Managed aquifer recharge is an internationally proven, low-cost solution that could improve drought resilience across the Murray Darling Basin. While significant potential for managed aquifer recharge (MAR) and conjunctive use of surface and groundwater resources has been identified in the Murray Darling Basin, there is a need to improve the quantification of benefits and establish clear policy and institutional foundations to incentivise uptake. Harmonised approaches between jurisdictions may promote confidence and uptake however different frameworks require further consultation and testing in the context of different water resources and regulatory systems. The current Basin Plan supports MAR and would be complementary with objectives and outcomes sought by future Basin Plans. Existing water accounting systems would need to accommodate this new capacity. Institutional arrangements and financial structures of water banking in the USA provide guidance for Australia. Demonstration sites would enable concurrent policy development and institutional set-up and provide critical experience to serve as models for wider adoption as part of future Murray Darling Basin plans.

***What are the risks of this motion doesn't get up?***

A failure of this motion to be supported would result in a missed opportunity to raise the profile and priority of a technology that offers the potential to make tangible differences to water management in Australia. Support is needed at all levels of government for the full potential benefits of MAR to be realised.

***What is the broader benefit to Basin communities if this motion is successful?***

MAR plays an important role in integrating the management of surface and groundwater resources for security of water supply while ensuring public health and environmental protection. Water storage is essential to improve the sustainability and resilience of water supply, both of which contribute to town water security, supporting agriculture and reducing pressure on the environment. In addition, natural treatment in the aquifer offers a low-cost, low-energy water treatment option.

**Recommendation:**

**That the CEO of the MDA write to the Federal Minister for the Environment and to the relevant Ministers in NSW and Queensland seeking an update and the latest information on proposed new dams and changes to existing dams including, but not limited to, the modified Bradfield Scheme (the John Kell proposal) and the Wyangala Dam.**

**Objective:**

That the CEO of the MDA write to the Federal Minister for the Environment and to the relevant Ministers in NSW and Queensland seeking an update and the latest information on proposed new dams and changes to existing dams including, but not limited to, the modified Bradfield Scheme (the John Kell proposal) and the Wyangala Dam.

This Motion was brought before the MDA Board for review and discussion on 18 July 2022. Following refinement, the Motion was submitted for the 2022 AGM.