



Murray Darling Association Inc.

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Region 4 Ordinary Meeting

Thursday 8 December 2022 – 9am AEDT

Venue: Mildura Rural City Council, 108 Madden Avenue, Mildura VIC 3500 or
Via Video Conference (Microsoft Teams link - included in calendar invitation)

MINUTES

1. ATTENDANCE

Meeting Opened at 9:08am

Cr Jason Modica (Mildura Rural City Council) <i>Chair of MDA Region 4</i>	Mark Lamb (MDA CEO) <i>Virtual</i>
Penny Robinson (Mildura Rural City Council) <i>Secretariat Support</i>	Tim Phillips (MDA) <i>Virtual</i>
Cr Marion Browne (Broken Hill City Council) <i>Virtual</i>	Greg Hill (Central Darling Shire Council) <i>Joined at 9:35am. Virtual</i>
Kerry Jones (Balranald Shire Council) <i>Virtual</i>	Guest Attendee Stuart Khan. <i>Virtual</i>

Cr Modica declared that there was an adequate quorum with both himself and Cr Browne in attendance as member delegates with voting rights from two different member councils.

Cr Modica also noted the sad passing of Jeffery Sowiak (Balranald Shire Council).

2. APOLOGIES

Jay Nankivelle - Broken Hill City Council

Ken Ross - Wentworth Shire Council

Cr Steve Heywood - Wentworth Shire Council

Tim Elstone - Wentworth Shire Council

Martin Hawson - Mildura Rural City Council

Mike Corleavy - Balranald Shire Council

3. CONFIRMATION OF PREVIOUS MINUTES

Motion

That the minutes of the:

- *MDA Region 4 Ordinary Meeting – 29 September 2022*

be accepted as circulated.

Moved: Cr Marion Browne

Seconded: Cr Jason Modica

Carried

4. BUSINESS ARISING

Nil

5. REPORTS

5.1 Guest Speaker - Professor Stuart Khan -

Professor Stuart Khan's expertise is within water quality, water recycling, chemical contaminants in water, seawater desalination, drinking water guidelines, health risks, sustainable water management, water analysis and coal seam gas.

Today Stuart would like to focus on MBD Dams as this is of particular relevance to local governments and use Tamworth as a key example.

Discussed sides presented that included:

Chaffey Dam (Peel River) Upgrade

Chaffey dam on the Pearl River and Chaffey Dam underwent an augmentation from a storage capacity of 62 gigalitres to 100 gigalitres.

Tamworth main drinking water supply, there are two main dams, one that's currently owned by Tamworth Regional Council, one being the Dungowan Dam and then their second dam is the Chaffey Dam.

The plan for this augmentation was first announced in in the NSW Parliament in 2013. This is the water minister at the time was Kevin Humphries.

Modelling prior to Chaffey Augmentation

Charts shared as part of the presentation explained allocation and modelling.

Discussed levels and security allocations, reliability of supply and allocations of licence.

Who paid for the Chaffey Dam Augmentation

Commonwealth \$18m

NSW Government \$28m

Local (Tamworth LG) \$4m

Tamworth also pay ongoing license fees >\$1m/year

No funding from irrigators/general security licensees

Stuart shared a media release from 10 October 2014 from Barnaby Joyce – “Barnaby Joyce applauds the start of Chaffey Dam augmentation”

The upgrade was completed in 2016.

Stuart shared a slide that showed the storage volume from January 2013 – July 2022 and discussed the level 5 Tamworth Water restrictions that occurred from January 2019.

What went Wrong and Storage Reserve

There was no extra drought reserve implemented for Tamworth as part of the upgrades.

Stuart discussed the storage reserve and urban reserve and reliability of the license/water allocation.

Plan to increase Dungowan Dam

The Department of Planning and Environment prepared a Dungowan Dam summary business case (Critical State Significant infrastructure) Report in January 2022.

Infrastructure Australia assessed this business case with a very low business case 0.09 - lowest

project ever assessed by Infrastructure Australia. This report was not recommended to proceed on to the project priority list. Needs Infrastructure Australia backing to proceed.

In summary - there is a misconception of if you build a bigger dam, you automatically get increased security however this case study of Tamworth and Chaffey Dam shows that this is not the case it is how the water allocations are managed. This should be a lesson learnt.

Cr Modica thanked Stuart for the presentation and Stuart was happy to take some questions from the MDA members.

Cr Modica – How does that interface with the Water Act in the Murray Darling Basin plan? Because the Act secure requires.

The improvement of the environment, yet if we're doing things that generate a larger benefit for a small stakeholder like the 2% of farmers in the country, which do a great job and deliver awesome results. But it seems inequitable in some ways.

Response - it's a finite system. There's a certain limited amount of water that can go around. When we're building new dams in the Murray Darling Basin, we're talking about changing, who's going to use that water. We're not really creating more water. And in fact, as you know, the whole Murray Darling Basin plan is still on a process of recovering water for all the environments. We're supposed to be moving in that direction.

(Greg Hill joined the meeting)

Mark Lamb - What conclusions can you draw from this? I mean, first of all, who set the rules around the, you know, the water allocation? It was that set at the time by NSW Water or was it set by somebody else?

Response - It's ultimately the NSW government and if you actually look at the water sharing plan over that period of time from 2013 till now, it has actually had revisions multiple times five or six times it has had revisions.

Mark Lamb - What conclusions can you draw from this in terms of the efficacy? I'd I'm not talking about extending dams but dams per se and also efficacy of dams. I'm not talking necessarily the Hell's gate kind of concept, but, you know, more localized dams close to our communities and how do you compare dams? Also recharging aquifers, which I know is a current new kind of new science that's been looked into.

Response - all localised dams are important dams in the Murray Darling Basin, the ability to be able to undertake commercial activities in the Murray Darling Basin be severely impeded without them. So I'm not suggesting that we shouldn't have dams, but I think what's really important is that we have a process that's very transparent when we're making decision making and really put on the table where the beneficiaries are going to be.

We're due to revise the National Water Initiative and the National Water Initiative talks about all of these principles about transparency and decision making, about understanding where the costs are going to come from where, who the beneficiaries are going to be.

There's interest which I think you're alluding to in potentially artificially recharging some of those aquifers as a way of storing water. That's certainly a strategy that's been used very successfully in some places, including Perth who are recharging their drinking water aquifers.

There are places in California, there's some big groundwater systems in California that are intentionally recharged through infiltration basins or some of them through infiltration wells where they pump it underground. I think there's potentially lots of opportunity there and CSIRO appears to agree with that. There are certain requirements that need to be in place. You need to have an aquifer and the aquifer needs to have capacity in it. It's not a one-size-fits-all solution.

Cr Modica – Commented on drought and flood and reflecting on this planning narrative.

Response - The worst time to be planning any kind of water augmentation is in a crisis and things

like Dungowan Dam, they get proposed in a crisis in a drought, which means a lot of the planning steps are skipped. Once something becomes critical infrastructure and becomes an emergency. Planning is key rather than responding to a crisis.

Cr Modica thanked Stuart for attending and he will provide his details to Mark Lamb, MDA for them to have further discussions.

5.2 Council Reports – each Council to provide a verbal update of activities from their region

Mildura Rural City Council:

Cr Modica attend the MDA Board meeting this week, discussion in dam management.

Cr Modica commented that this was a good meeting.

Cr Modica discussed the current flooding in Mildura and its surrounds. SES VIC, ICC and MRCC have been putting in a huge amount of work, levee works - really conscious of people and business displaced. The flood is also a tourist attraction. Floods have put things on hold, great communications with other upstream councils and what they have learnt in this situation.

Broken Hill City Council:

Nothing specific to report from Broken Hill at this time.

Cr Browne commented that she looked at the at the presentation the other night from Namoi.

Central Darling Shire Council:

Tilpa is now fully evacuated and the flood water coming down the Darling.

Peaked at Tipla - not as high as predicted.

Wilcania at 10.45m, forecast for 11m - not peaked yet.

Medinee still doing controlled releases from lake system.

Water NSW has buffer for Wilcannia - flows expected to hit Wilcannia in January.

Biggest concern now is over at Ivanhoe, there is a fair bit of water to the South Ivanhoe, between Ivanhoe and Hay, and then also the Balranalds Rd from Ivanhoe across to Balranalds.

LMC meetings being held weekly.

Aerial euthanizing of stranded stock may need to commence – fodder drops are not possible.

Mining company Tronox cannot access their site - sourcing funding to assist with this issue.

Mosquitoes and midges are an issue in the evening.

Four people evacuated from Tilpa.

Balranald Shire Council:

Been in flood operations for the past 2 months - natural disaster declared on the 14th of September and have been in that mode since.

Flood has impacted on several large farming areas - not just grazing and cropping, but also horticulture (pecans and almonds). Wakulla River is 2km wide.

Biggest concern is the Lachlan River as it forms the eastern boundary of the Shire as multiple creeks/rivers feed into this. Water from Forbes has not arrived as yet. Tronox mine is also an issue. Some stock trucks are ignoring road closures.

Stock losses in 10's of thousands, not all from flood drownings but from fly strike and mosquitoes.

LLS have lifted 8000 sheep and goat lifts. Unfortunately, have had goats jumping out of the rescue

cage in flight.

Some farmers are using their own machinery to construct ways out from properties. Oxley has been evacuated due to water over the road - about 1.5m on the road.

Balranald town itself is relatively fine. Well resourced with strike team assistance. Lower Murray EOC in operation twice a day, 7 days a week.

Small village of Euston, which is adjacent to Robinvale on the Murray, they're very concerned – have used drop in levees. Working well with minimal seepage.

Believe that they have reached their peak.

Last week a private levee broke and diverted water, dropped the water level over 2 days - has delayed peaks down river.

Trying to open tourist routes but difficult due to road damage.

5.3 Water Meetings Attended

Nil

5.4 MDA CEO's Report December 2022

Mark noted his report as read by members and highlighted the following:

Minister Plebisek attended the conference Mark has had 1:1 with her since the conference. There is a line of communication here now extended to Mark which is quite positive.

SQNSW is partnering with MDA on a drought resilience hub - preparing communities for drought and also floods.

Mark will be meeting with One Basin CRC as part of 4 key initiatives on the MDA agenda.

CSIRO have a good working relationship with MDA at this time - managing aquifer recharge, water related issues. MDA have been engaged by CSIRO on circular economy – this has tangible benefits for MDA members.

Mark is pleased with the MDA conference outcomes and feedback - from 15 motions, 13 stood. Tim has been working on these motions. Sent out over 100 engagement letters - Tim putting the motions and updates on the website.

Working on membership - Tamworth has now come back on board for membership.

Individual memberships increased.

6. GENERAL BUSINESS

Nil

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING:

MDA Region 4 Ordinary Meeting
Thursday 16 March 2023
9am to 11am (AEDT)
108 Madden Avenue, Mildura VIC 3500 or via Microsoft TEAMS

MDA Region 4 AGM
Wednesday 31 May 2023
9am to 10am (AEDT)
108 Madden Avenue, Mildura VIC 3500 or via Microsoft TEAMS

Dates noted by the member councils in attendance.

8. CLOSE – 10:19am

*The Murray Darling Association acknowledges and thanks
Mildura Rural City Council for their support in
hosting this meeting of Region 4.*