



## Region 4 Ordinary Meeting

Wednesday 29 January 2020 – 2:30pm EST

Venue: The Midway Centre, 6 Midway Drive, Buronga, NSW

### MINUTES

#### 1. ATTENDANCE – Meeting opened at 2:30pm

In Person	By Videoconference
Cr Jane MacAllister (Wentworth Shire Council)	Emma Bradbury
Cr Jason Modica (Mildura Rural City Council)	
Cr Steve Heywood (Wentworth Shire Council)	
Cr Steve O'Halloran (Balranald Shire Council)	
Cr Marion Brown (Broken Hill City Council)	

#### 2. APOLOGIES

Ken Ross (GM WSC), Greg Hill (CDS), Sarah Philpott (MRCC) Anthony Cirillo (MRCC) Trevor Jolliffe (BC), Darriea Turley (BHCC)

#### 3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Nil

#### 4. WELCOME

Cr MacAllister

#### 5. MINUTES

Minutes of the previous meeting held on 24 September 2019 (amendments completed)

#### 6. BUSINESS ARISING

#### 7. REPORTS

The following verbal reports to be provided

##### 7.1 Chairman's Report – Cr MacAllister

Since last meeting travelled to Toowoomba - Cubbie Station tour was really interesting 12 or 16 properties amalgamated - they can hold 459 GL - 0% to 99% capacity in 30 days. Cubbie Station was observed to be dry.

##### 7.1.1 Menindee Old Town Weir (Attachment 2)

The Old Weir has been removed many questions from locals - mistrust around Menindee and this action has done nothing to restore faith – authorized through DPIE

##### 7.1.2 Critical Water Advisory Panel update (Attachment 3)

Imposed embargo ahead of rains until 31 January 2020.

Domestic and stock fee waivers **(What does this mean for users / statutory obligations of government if they haven't paid fees? Jane will ask at the next CWAP)**

7.1.3 Terms of Reference - Menindee Water Saving Project Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG) (Attachment 4)

Draft TOR if anyone has any thoughts please forward to Jane  
If we can come up with an alternative there is a possibility the Government is looking for alternatives

7.1.4 Mick Keelty 1<sup>st</sup> Year report (Attachment 5)

Today's meeting – importance of connectivity of Darling – communities are realizing Murray has to put in 20%

Queensland not metering – premise is agriculture & horticulture – no push healthy water way first – 640/480 rule has to be revised – well attended approx. 150

Jane will provide a report of meeting (Attached to Minutes)

*Jason Modica left meeting at 3:54pm*

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

Balranald – Cr O'Halloran couldn't believe the amount of water coming out of the Murrumbidgee, it is huge – red tape for application for bores need to lobby to hasten this process

Wentworth – Pooncarie on bore water – still trucking water to landholders on request

Broken Hill – Sent an addendum to report on MDA conference Cr Tom Kennedy to write to Premier and local member re Basin plan – letter sent to Premier

Ramsar – where is this up to – long term will be important

**MOTION - That MDA Region 4 request a formal update from the FWJO in relation to the Menindee RAMSAR proposal and progress on the feasibility report.**

**Moved Marion Brown**

**Seconded Steve Heywood**

Water Meetings Attended

Previously spoken about

## 8. GENERAL BUSINESS

8.1 Toorale update (Attachment 6) – 9 February 2020 meeting onsite

8.2 MDA submission to ACCC

8.3 Climate Ready Regions Conference Saturday 18 April 2020 (Attachment 7)

MDA Region 4 – Clare also opportunity for networking with SA Councils

8.4 MDA Climate Change Position Statement & Action Plan (Attachment 8 & 9) WITHDRAWN FROM AGENDA

8.5 Geographical Names Board consultation – Dual Naming of Darling as Baaka River (Attachment 10)

8.6 MDA Region 4 proposed meeting dates 1:00pm start as follows:

10 March

9 June

8 September

8 December

Emma Bradbury Briefing

- Feedback – Item 8.4 changed document from a climate change position statement to MDA Climate ready communities - revised document is a strategic document – Emma will send out
- Marion to forward BH Climate change resolution to [gmea@wentworth.nsw.gov.au](mailto:gmea@wentworth.nsw.gov.au)

- MDB communities funding – Regional Economic Diversification Program - Partnering with 6 councils employ Economic diversification officers – Wentworth Council opportunity for partner
- 2020 Strategic planning workshop 13-14 March 2020 Moama – CSIRO will present
- National Conference 12-14 August 2020 at Shepparton – Study tour first day Barmah Choke
- Wentworth to resubmit application for 2021 conference

**9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING 10 March 2020 at 1:00pm**

**10. CLOSE at 4:30pm**

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

## Interim Inspector-General inquiry into Murray Darling Basin Agreement

Mildura 29 January 2020

Introduction, Mick Keelty spoke about the focus of this inquiry, being whether the River Murray Waters Agreement 1914 is meeting the needs of communities, if the tri state agreement foresaw this type of drought event.

(Background: On 9 September 1914, The Prime Minister and three Premiers concluded the River Murray Waters Agreement, establishing a Commission of four, unanimous voting, cost sharing, water sharing – which included SA's Entitlement Flow, construction of Hume Dam, Lake Victoria Storage, 26 locks and weirs between Blanchetown and Echuca, and nine locks on either the Darling or Murrumbidgee Rivers.

By signing this agreement, the governments of NSW and Vic agreed to limit their Constitutional powers to manage the waters of the River Murray as they saw fit and to provide SA with a share of those resources.)

Keelty explained that this is not an inquiry into water trading – the ACCC interim report is due 31 March, the final report due October 2020.

This Inquiry has been given only two months to deliver its report.

Similarly, this inquiry is not part of the Socio-Economic inquiry, which has just consulted widely.

He explained that the Agreement predated the Basin Plan, which were both followed by targets for SDL's and that he is interested in collecting ideas about what is working and what is not.

He told the gathering of 100 or so at Mildura that irrigators on the NSW Murray are facing their third year of zero allocation, with many looking at foreclosure.

Interested in things that may be changed and how. Points already raised include SA carryover; Environmental outcomes; Conveyance water accounting; RiverOps (especially spill at Choke).

There has been no rain.

Q: Jim Wilton (former Murray Lower Darling CMA) "We looked at growth rings on redgums and found there were floods historically every 7-9 years. What has changed are the major storages off river, decreasing the capacity to deal with circumstances like now. Also, the lower lakes and evaporation of the pools, whether they should be returned to estuarine. Critical Human needs must take priority, currently around 2,160 Bn litres flow out to sea. A review of the lower lakes would also result in review of critical water needs.

Precipitation inflow cloud seeding has been trialled. Lengthen timeframe for what is held in reserve, as we are experiencing longer dry periods.

A: Keelty We have already flagged an inquiry into Lock Zero. Also, the science around dilution flows and salinity needs to be tested. Recommended Independent Science Forum. Northern Basin Commissioner Report recommended establishment of a technology forum.

Q: Howard Jones (Retired irrigator and environmentalist, former BCC member, Chair South West Water Users Association) Allocations, especially NSW Murray "give" for General Security NSW licences. Also, NSW management of the Darling needs looking at.

A: Wanted to hear from Indigenous groups and people from here.

Q: Jane MacAllister: Over consulted, lack of action despite number of commissions, reports, etc = no faith in government or agencies to change anything. If this process began as response to bellyaching from vocal group further upstream along the Murray, so they got a private meeting with yourself and the Minister, must we adopt anarchical techniques to get attention? There are no consultations along the Darling River communities. We (along

the Darling) have been patient and respectful and still we must endure inequity in WSP's, which will not be changed to align with legislation. Meanwhile, our river and everything around it continues to die. Federal agencies and MDBA refused to acknowledge the authority of the SA Royal Commission. Had the High Court challenge been allowed to be heard, which every state and territory had joined one side or the other, or both as NSW did, we may have an answer to the authority of State Royal Commissions and pressure may have been brought to bear. Serious concerns have been raised about the legality of some of the management and policies and we wish for an overarching national judicial oversight, there used to be the NWC until 2014. Water management needs to be taken out of political direction, it is being watched internationally and it is letting us all down.

A: NBC report was scathing towards Department Ag and my opinion has not changed. I have known Bret Walker QC for decades and share his frustration at Royal Commission responses. The meeting was held at my request, due to the concern about effigy with noose when the Minister and myself visited the region. Niall Blair was under police protection at Menindee, due to death threats. This is not the way to get your point across. I am here because I genuinely want to get a feel for what local communities are concerned about. I will be back.

Q: Robert Biggs (Mallee CMA) On Dec 6, 2019, you said "Murray Darling corruption is undermining faith in the Plan." It is being corrupted by governments and agencies. Who is paying for the private dams? Rivers are being converted into drains / delivery systems. On average, historically 18% of SA water came from the Darling River. Correction between allocations when 20% from Darling. Return to legalities in system. Mildura is an oasis and will be corroded if we can't get water. I live in Red Cliffs and have had my water turned off because of Blue-Green Algae. BGA could go all year, if river is not flushing as it should. Re 70GL in the Northern Basin, all for the sake of 120 jobs in the Northern Basin.

A: As Northern Basin Commissioner, I referred further matters to NSW ICAC and Vic Ombudsman, NRAR has been established. Still don't have accurate measure of QLD Floodplain harvesting extraction amounts.

Q: Rachel Strachan (Lower Darling Irrigator) Part of the Tri-State Agreement only now being understood is the importance of northern basin flows into the lower Darling. Priorities Environment and Cultural water THEN irrigation water. Our (Burtundy) Station records show there was only ever 3 months of cease-to-flow and the records go back to the mid 1800's. Darling River water into the Murray was a useful resource, Menindee was critical for General Security users along the Murray.

A: FloodPlain Harvesting IS part of this inquiry.

Q: Frank Dimasi (table grape grower, former Chair of FMIT, family in Mildura since 1952 etc etc) High value customers assets restricted, decrease in property rights, no compensation. Over extraction in north effecting eastern seaboard (?) places all communities at risk. Vic Minister moratorium, thank her for that. Make northern states comply. Overbank environmental water during summer creates zombie water (?) Keeping Murray mouth open is contrary to nature (?) (Pushback from audience on points)

Q: Lindsay Leake: Main concern is lack of flows. The long term average was 9,600GL, revised down to 5,800GL (now 3,000GL) Governments, Industry take into account resource is disappearing. Management failure from top to bottom. Co-ordination between Commonwealth, State and Local government is required.

A: Development unabated cannot go on.

Q: Badger Bates (Barka Wimpatja = Darling River blackfella): Water storages, Menindee, Fish kills, FloodPlain Harvesting MUST STOP. No rain = drought. Storages, irrigation forgot black and white culture. We are station people with bullocks, cannot let bullocks go without food or water, we get fined, yet government can take water and let everything die, including the native animals, fish. Barkandji people invite Mick Keelty to visit Menindee. What good is Native Title? May as well take it back, we have got no river and will not take the shut up money offered. We want what is best for all of us to step together. Killing Mildura with Blue-green algae.

A: Was at Toorale, take credit for funding for fishways and weirs, trying to get NBAN functional.

Badger: Toorale not gonna save the Barka. Let the Darling River flow.

Q: ? Kevin Cock: I was at Canberra and invited them to come to Rally, was at the meeting. Told we've given money to States and they are not playing. Bureaucrats made decisions and did not listen to locals. Would a Royal Commission actually change anything?

A: Metering / telemetry, single point of truth, licence terminology, state to state are the low hanging fruit. Why wait for a Royal Commission? What happens in the meantime?

Q: Richard Wells (Chair of Merbein Common) every irrigator is crapping themselves that rules could be changed regarding High Security. Vic 56%, NSW/SA 100% allocations at the moment. Conservative policy. Environmental water in 2016 flow past here with locks taken out. Authorities afraid to let additional water out of Hume, as it floods the floodplain growers, who may require compensation. Overbank flows have been non-existent since 1956. Change the status of farming community below Hume.

Q: Alan Whyte (Lower Darling Irrigator): Used to be in irrigation before the river ran dry. No sympathy for NSW General Security Irrigators – we had to wait five years for buyback and my citrus trees are being bulldozed as we speak, lovely trees. Biggest mess gets ignored by State and Federal Governments. 50 years everyone forgot about the river. Progress - need to run the river as a whole system. NSW categorical refusal. Agriculture has worked well until recently. Focus on Darling – where does the MDB Agreement speak to the Darling? 640/480 trigger rule. Recalibration of the Menindee Lakes Scheme, as it was engineered incorrectly due to human error. Policy decisions to decrease storage at Menindee. CEWH out to game the system as much as anyone. Intention of rules contrary to current usage (by all parties). Licence acquisitions supply has increased fourfold from the top storage.

A: Thank you, very constructive.

Conclusion by Mick Keelty: We now have an office here in Mildura. Will be up the road. Thank you for your time, I will come back after the report is done, so you can keep me to account.

Badger: Recommendation from today suggested – Please keep water in the Darling – it will help Mildura.

Note: Met Sam from IIG office and Di, who will be Managing the MDBA office in Mildura, established contact and plan for future contact with both, including invitations to be extended to address MDA Region 4 and / or Wentworth Shire Council.

Jane MacAllister

Councillor, Wentworth Shire

Chair Region 4 and

Vice President Murray Darling Association