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MEDIA RELEASE

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Councils concerned by announcement of low flows over Easter

The Murray-Darling Basin Authority this week advised that with recent rain across the Murray catchments, irrigation demand is likely to drop causing low river levels in the Murray River over Easter.

Councils along the Murray River have expressed deep concern at this announcement and are calling for a move to a fairer and more sustainable approach to river management, one that considers all water economies.

Councils recognise that river operations are managed in response to demand by irrigation water users. However, Basin communities rely on our river systems for more than irrigation alone. It is important that our rivers support the full range of uses that rely on reliable flows to support our economy.

MDA, the peak body for councils in the Murray-Darling Basin agrees. "In this time of changing climate, economies and technologies we must move to recognize and value the full spectrum of water uses, especially those that contribute positively to the environmental health and well-being of the ecosystem and support economic diversity and resilience," CEO Emma Bradbury said. "It is essential to the social, cultural and economic wellbeing of our communities."

This is especially important for tourism dependent communities along the Murray River. The visitor economy generates almost \$12 billion dollars a year in the Basin.

"With Australia looking to rebuild it's economy in the post-Covid era, and governments driving regional visitation, management of the river systems in the Murray Darling must play its part."

Ecotourism Australia Chief Executive Rod Hillman suggests that we need to consider tourism in a similar way to irrigation, acknowledging that there are times where water is flow is more important than others.

"Easter will be important for all businesses engaged in tourism after a really tough year and having water in the river will greatly enhance the visitor experience and be a great way of attracting people to the River for a range of tourism and recreation activities," said Rod.

"Greater engagement with the tourism industry in making these decisions will benefit all."

MDA Chairman and member of the MDBA Basin Communities Committee Cr David Thurley OAM added "Post Covid, governments are encouraging Australians to travel to the regions to inject some

money and revitalise local communities that have been hard hit and many of these are along the Murray.

Visitors to the regions want to see our rivers healthy and well, particularly after rain. Low flows during peak visitation period will cost jobs in our regional economies, adding to the already devastating impact of droughts, bushfire and Covid-19.

I encourage the MDBA to ensure there are adequate flows at Easter to support and drive visitation to our regions," Cr Thurley said.

The MDA has also written to Basin Ministers and the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder, recognising that without their collective support the MDBA may be, however willing, unable to change the settings to maintain adequate flows over Easter.

ENDS *For more information, contact Murray Darling Association Chief Executive Officer, Emma Bradbury on 0429 905 017 or Cr David Thurley on 0419 510 274.*