



Murray Darling Association Inc.

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Ordinary Meeting of the Board
Meeting 397
Monday 20th April 2020
<https://zoom.us/j/532872831>

MINUTES - MEETING No. 397

1. ATTENDANCE

Meeting declared open at 10.36am

1.1. Present

Cr David Thurley	Albury City Council	Region 1
Cr Dennis Patterson	City of Greater Shepparton	Region 2
Cr Jane MacAllister	Wentworth Shire Council	Region 4
Cr Peter Raison	Mid Murray Council	Region 5
Cr Melissa Rebbeck	Alexandrina Council	Region 6
Cr Andrew Tilley	City of Mitcham	Region 7
Cr Brian Lockyer	Barunga West Council	Region 8
Cr Paul Maytom	Leeton Shire Council	Region 9
Cr Phyllis Miller	Forbes Shire Council	Region 10
Cr John Campbell	Gunnedah Council	Region 11
Cr Richard Marsh	Balonne Shire Council	Region 12
Pete George	M&S Group	Treasurer
Emma Bradbury	MDA	CEO
Tony Banks	MDA	Executive
Jessica Maher	MDA	Minute Taker

1.2. Apologies:

1.3. Declarations

J MacAllister declared to the board that she has started working with the Nature Conservation NSW since 3rd of March 2020.

M Rebbeck also declared ongoing role within her own business regarding Climate and Agricultural Support for farmers to support them to manage their properties in a changing and variable climate, as well as her ongoing interest and roles within natural resource management space as well.

2. PREVIOUS MINUTES

2.1. [Meeting 396](#) held via Zoom Calendar Monday 23rd March 2020

Motion: That the minutes of board meeting 396 are approved as an accurate record of that meeting.

Cr Campbell / B Lockyer

Carried

3. REPORTS

3.1. Chairman's report

D Thurley reported that it has been a very quiet month in Region 1 and Albury. Updates included reasonable rain and that storages are rising very slowly.

3.2. [Finance Report:](#)

P George spoke to the financial reports and provided a comprehensive overview, with the financials reflecting the end of the MDA's financial year.

J MacAllister noted the difficulty in accessing and understanding this month's financial reports due to technological issues and late distribution of the end of financial year documents.

E Bradbury assured the board that the up-to-date financial reports would be distributed, and further comments provided by P George, following the board meeting.

A Tilley enquired about the categorisation of the grant as a liability in financial terms.

P George noted that a grant that has been received in advance cannot be included as income in that financial year. It must be expended over the time where that project has been used.

Motion: That the finance reports are noted
Cr Patterson / A Tilley

Carried

J MacAllister – voted against.

3.3. [Chief Executive Officers report](#)

In addition to the tabled CEO's Report, E Bradbury provided the following update:

Funding: E Bradbury notified the board that the Murray-Darling Basin Economic Development Fund submission assessment panel process is ongoing. The MDA currently has three project applications submitted to the funding, with results expected mid-May.

Memberships: E Bradbury noted that the MDA executive team has been working hard on developing products and services to attract memberships. In light of circumstances around COVID-19, the MDA met with Go1 to discuss the further development of the MDA academy. More information will be forthcoming on these products as they develop.

Engagement: In addition to the list of engagements in the CEO's report, E Bradbury noted that she met with National Farmers Federation President Fiona Simson and a member of the NFF Executive team, who are very keen to be involved with the Basin Communities Leadership Program leadership project.

J MacAllister requested minutes from the floodplain harvesting meeting.

ACTION: MDA executive to provide minutes for the floodplain harvesting meeting.

Motion: That the CEO's report is noted.

D Thurley / M Rebbeck

Carried

3.4. [Region reports](#)

Region 6

Cr Melissa Rebbbeck: *I was heartened by the recent conversation with E Bradbury and CSIRO, and happy to hear about NFF. I also think that some of the opportunities that we identified there fit in with the recommendations from Mick Keelty's report. From a knowledge perspective, I'd like to see how we can progress some of those recommendations.*

Region 12

Richard Marsh: *I had a discussion with Region 4 Chair Jane MacAllister last week regarding the Region 4 Report and I just want to set the record straight on some of the Cubbie matters that are mentioned there. As Jane said, Cubbie is the favourite of everybody. I just want to make a couple of comments there, firstly Cubbie can't hold 1.3 million megalitres, which is the equivalent of 1,300 gicalitres. Its current storage is 469 GL and Sydney Harbour is 500GL. The other thing that Cubbie did get mixed up in going back into August last year was with the sell down with Shandong Ruyi from 90% to 51%, with the balance to Macquarie Ag. Under that sell down, there were some agreements that were volunteered, which were accepted. The 10% first flush flow is standard in the existing Queensland rules / state legislation. The rules there are the volume that users can extract in the first five days is reduced by 10%. Cubbie, in the agreement, have increased that to a 50% reduction where it's a low flow event. If it's a medium flow event, they will give up 25% reduction of extraction rights. Largely Cubbie have agreed they'll let up to 10gl flow past their pumps by restricting their take during the 5 day period and it's in excess of what the requirements are in QLD. The general practice in the Northern Basin is that 10% early flow past. We hear lots of things about the Darling and the fact that it's dry. I think we see too much criticism of where the water might go. I point out to everybody the Darling has never been a constant flow river. I accept that we have to make efficient use of our water and all these people involved in the system need to comply to make the requirements. I spent the tour of the conference in Leeton, tour of the Murrumbidgee, wouldn't it be nice to have this flow of water going down our channels? Yes, water does flow in the northern Basin when it is available, but other times it runs dry.*

P Maytom left at 11.07am

A Tilley noted the importance of the study tour in understanding the context and history of Cubbie Station, although not necessarily supporting.

Region 4

Cr Jane MacAllister: *Thank you Richard for your generous explanation and fact-checking. I'd be really interested in seeing how QLD rules work. I have to admit that's an area that I'm not really familiar with. I think it does, particularly in NSW where we don't have any storages, which is part of the problem of the zero allocation on the NSW Murray because we are so reliant in NSW on water coming across the water, it is important that we understand. While I'm talking about our region and the excitement of the water coming down, the ephemeral nature of the Darling River is one that's often used by way of deflecting the conversation. Historically, it's always been connected apart from up to 14 days at the most of no water – it's usually been low flow continually running through. There have been some exceptions. The last cease to flow before this one was 500 days, but this one that we've just received rains from the North connected to the Murray was 18 months. It is a problem that is increasing in intensity and while there is no water at all it is killing the ecosystem. While we're on the point and referring back to my initial declaration of interest, the lifeblood alliance, of which the Nature Conservation Council of NSW is a member, has put out a campaign for buying back more water seeing as how there is still 47.4 GL under the cap available for purchase legally and the money is still there to do that. At the last meeting, there was a question put, would the MDA support this buybacks campaign?*

E Bradbury noted that the MDA's current position has advocated for a cap on water buybacks. The MDA recognises that buybacks are one part on a suite of measures and the impacts of buyback on one region are different to other regions.

E Bradbury encouraged J MacAllister to forward relevant information and the MDA board will start a conversation to see how we collaborate.

Region 8

B Lockyer: *Pretty quiet in Region 8. Obviously we've got the same situation as across the Basin. I am currently in the process of communicating with Mayor Clarke to do our region report for the annual report, so I'll have that finalised soon. Excited to be getting back into gear now.*

3.4.1. Appointment to the board – Region 5

Following the AGM at Region 5, Cr Peter Hunter concluded a 5-year term as regional chair.

Cr Peter Raison of Mid-Murray Council, a long-term delegate of the council was elected to the chair.

Motion: That the MDA

- i) Thanks, and commend Cr Peter Hunter for his valuable contribution to the board and to Region 5, and
- ii) Note the election of Cr Peter Raison of Mid Murray Council to the position of chair of Region 5, and his appointment to the board of the MDA.

P Miller / J Campbell

Carried

Region 5

Cr Peter Raison: *I apologise for not filing a report, due to circumstances around COVID-19. I just want to say a big thank you for outgoing chair P Hunter for everything that he has done. Our region is very happy that Region 4 is getting water down the Darling. We've still got full councils in Region 5 who are happy to be members, which is a good thing.*

Motion: That the MDA

- i) Thanks, and commend Cr Richard Marsh for his valuable contribution to the board and to Region 12, and
- ii) Note the election of Cr Sam O'Toole to the position of chair of Region 12, and her appointment to the board of the MDA.

D Thurley/ P Miller

Carried

4. CORRESPONDENCE

4.1. Correspondences Out

With Queensland Local Government elections held in April, the MDA have forwarded the following Letter of Congratulations

4.1.1 [Mayor Samantha O'Toole](#) – Balonne Shire Council

4.2. Correspondences In

4.2.1

Motion: That the Board receive correspondence.

P Maytom / J MacAllister

Carried

5 BUSINESS ARISING

5.1 Review of actions table

MDA Matters in Progress arising from previous Meetings

Board to review the motions arising and actions completed in detail from previous board meetings as per discussions held at Board Meeting 396 – 23rd March 2020

Motion: That the Board note updates

J Campbell / P Miller

Carried

5.2 Strategic Planning Workshop 2020

Meeting 396 – Item 5.2 considered the outcomes of the 2020 SPW, including top priorities. Further information and the opportunity for further consideration and feedback was requested. Feedback from R6 was sent to all board members via email on 7th April. Further feedback via comment sheets was also received relating to process matters. The **Strategic Planning Workshop Communications Report** were previously distributed.

E Bradbury noted that the feedback from Region 6 and other regions will be extremely valuable, as feedback from the regions will be collated and used in collaboration with a consultant to produce a body of work, and then brief that consultant and work with them to have a draft plan to put the board at the June board meeting.

Motion: That the board

- a) note the 3 Top Priorities identified at the strategic planning workshop,
 - i) *Development and production of **Membership Tools and Services**.*
 - ii) *Implementation of **Strategic Projects, Initiatives and Programs** within the wider MDB Footprint.*
 - iii) *Establishment of the **Murray-Darling Basin Local Government Centre of Excellence**.*
- b) Note the Strategic Planning Communications Report and summary notes **[Confidential]**
- c) Approve the appointment of an external consultant to develop the Strategic Plan 2020 - 2024 and supporting documents in line with local government standards using the integrated planning and reporting framework

D Thurley / D Patterson

Carried

5.3 Membership Fee 2020/2021

Invoicing for membership fees for the 2020/2021 membership year are due to be calculated and prepared in May for distribution to councils and members on or before 30 June 2020. With the events on 2019/20 including drought, bushfires and now Covid-19, we recognise that many councils will be closely scrutinising their budget allocations and may consider reducing memberships. MDA's membership fees usually increase annually in line with either CPI or general rates increases. In order to acknowledge the hardship on councils that may be felt as a result of extraordinary events, and to encourage membership continuity, it is recommended that the MDA does not increase membership fees this year.

Motion: That

- a. the fees for Membership to the MDA for the period 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021 remain unchanged from 2019/20 in recognition of financial hardship on rural communities due to drought, bushfires and Covid 19.
- b. Fees for the period 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021 are set as follows
 - Local Government entity \$0.305 cents per head of population, capped at \$6,681.82 (ex GST).Under this pricing, the cap benefits councils with a population exceeding 21,900
 - Non-local government entity \$350 (ex GST)
 - Individual \$90 (ex GST)
 - Life Member no feeMembership fees for new members will be pro-rata, with an annual renewal date of 1 July.

P Miller / J Campbell

Carried

5.3.1 Extinction of historical discounts

In July 2015 at board meeting 348 motion 8, the board of the MDA recognised the inequity arising from an historical and unaccountable discount structure benefiting some councils. The board resolved as follows.

Motion: That the board a) Adopts the proposed fee schedule for the 2015/16 year b) Explicitly extinguishes any distinction between riparian and non-riparian categories of membership c) Resolves that all new members will pay full rate from commencement. d) Will phase out all discounts by 2020.

Implementation of that motion over the last five years has resulted in the loss of 4 member councils as a result of the withdrawal of the discount, with a further 8 transitioning to full fee paying with the last remaining discount to be extinguished on 1 July 2020.

Motion: That the board note the complete implementation of motion 348 – 8, completing the removal of all historical discounts.

J MacAllister / P Raison

Carried

A Tilley agreed with the motion, but noted his interest in further discussions around regional equity, particularly exploring the different experiences for councils who are not directly on the Murray River.

P Miller noted that having two pricing structures would undermine the MDA’s work and instead suggested that the MDA needs to try to increase the organisation’s benefit to our members.

5.4 National Conference 2020

The executive team are continuing to explore options for delivery of the 2020 National conference, including development of virtual tours, workshops and symposia, with discussions continuing regarding product development, costs, and revenue opportunities. The challenges presented by current restrictions have provided some genuinely exciting opportunities to review our delivery model. A detailed report will be provided, when decisions are taken.

Cr MacAllister suggested that each of the MDA regions should produce a two minute video about their region, as an engaging method of education across regions and to be included as part of the National Conference 2020.

D Patterson acknowledged that the MDA needs to consider other options as well as the traditional national conference option during the COVID-19 context.

P Miller agreed, but noted that following the lock-down period, MDA members will be keen to meet physically at an in-person event.

5.5 Strategic Advisory Group

Board meeting 396 5.2 resolved to invite Bob Stewart to join the Strategic Advisory Group. Bob Stewart accepted the invitation.

Motion: That the board approve the appointment of Bob Stewart – Administrator of Central Darling Shire to the Strategic Advisory Group.

J MacAllister / P Maytom

Carried

6 GENERAL BUSINESS

6.1 [Code of Conduct](#) and [Constitution](#)

The MDA 2015 Code of Conduct is due for a timely refresh and review, particularly focussing on the Boards:

1. Declarations of Interest

2. Inductions
3. General Conduct

- Motion:** All Chairs to commit to current Code of Conduct by:
- a. Reviewing the Current Code of Conduct
 - b. Provide feedback for any update requirements

D Thurley / D Patterson

J MacAllister noted that the Code of Conduct should form a key document in the MDA's induction process for both board and MDA members, and would like further work to be done on how to use these documents at a region level.

E Bradbury said the MDA is in the process of looking at capable resources to start delivering these products and services, and enhancing membership values

P Miller expressed concern over further training for board members, noting extensive existing requirements from other commitments.

6.2 BCLP Re-scheduling

Considering the current and emerging circumstances around COVID-19, the Murray Darling Association (MDA) will reschedule the Basin Communities Leadership Program (BCLP) workshops in the Lower Lakes/Loxton and combined Cobdogla-Barmera/Berri regions to a date to be determined subject to government advice.

[Media Release](#)

Motion: Board to note the re-scheduling and receive the Media Release

P Miller / J Campbell

Carried

6.3 BCLP Video

The MDA procured the services of Rayner TV to develop the BCLP introduction video as part of the BCLP curriculum delivery. The video was made available to the board for reviewing and feedback.

Motion: That the Board note the content and approve for distribution

D Thurley / A Tilley

Carried

6.4 Socio-Economic Assessment Panel Report Submission

The MDA submitted feedback to the Socio-Economic Assessment Panel on 7th April 2020. It should be noted that this report was prepared by the team in particularly challenging circumstances, with exceptional work done by Policy Officer James Marshall.

[Report submission](#)

Motion: That the Board note the report submission

J Campbell / J MacAllister

Carried

6.5 Climate Ready Communities – MDA Commitment to Action

Board meeting 392 Motion 6.2 resolved That the MDA express a statement of climate ready communities. A position statement has been drafted, with provision for each region to contribute a region profile and commitment to support their communities to be climate ready.

[Region 11's profile](#)

J Campbell provided an update to the board on Region 11's draft position statement, and particularly noted

the process of consultation. J Campbell noted that there was consultation on this, with Tenterfield on the phone. Councils were noted to take advance notice. I came home and put it all together, and sent it out to get there together on the day. Since the strategic plan workshop, with Melissa's ideas, we've added this to. We're taking this to our AGM in June 11. We're sending it out to ALL councils, not just member councils.

M Rebbeck commended J Campbell on Region 11's draft statement, and leadership in putting together this draft ahead of the other regions. M Rebbeck noted that she would like to see Region 6 follow suit.

E Bradbury echoed M Rebbeck's comments, and also commended Region 11's strategy for engaging non-member councils.

P Miller noted that the past month has been challenging for Region 10, and that she is keen to contribute more as we come out of this crisis situation.

Motion: That the Board note Region 11's feedback and provide their own regional reports.

J Campbell / B Lockyer

Carried

ACTION: MDA to circulate Climate Ready Communities Region template and region reports for group discussion.

6.6 MDA Delegates Report for Tabling at Council

At the SPW in March, one of the top 3 priorities identified by the leadership team was *Development and production of **Membership Tools and Services***.

The development of the **MDA Delegate's Report to Council** is a key service for members and will support delegates to report back to their councils consistently, regularly and succinctly. The **MDA Delegate's Report to Council** will be produced monthly and will be presented to the board for noting and comment prior to being directly emailed to each member council's nominated delegate for tabling at their next council meeting. The *MDA Delegate's Report to Council* is designed

- to be no more than 1 x A4 double sided in length
- to be tabled at every member council's monthly council meeting, regardless of activity in that region during that month
- to provide consistent input to member councils at the Basin scale
- to promote knowledge sharing
- to reduce the workload on elected members in actively reporting back on their committee involvement
- to encourage more active participation and engagement by member councils
- to use content that is already produced monthly; and
- to provide easy access to further information
- to be distributed via our CRM platform **only** to delegate members.

Board members are encouraged to consider the process and the content for this service and provide any comments of feedback that may strengthen the product. This product will benefit from continuous feedback and input.

J MacAllister commended the MDA executive team, noting that it would be a useful tool for reporting back to councils.

Motion: That the board note the April/May **MDA Delegate's Report to Council** and approve its distribution to delegates.

J MacAllister / A Tilley

Carried

6.7 MDA Communication Reports and Regional Meeting Minutes

Date	Report No	Topic	Author	Approved
08/04/2020	200408	Salesforce Security	Jess Maher	E. Bradbury
16/03/2020	Region 5 Minutes	AGM	Cr Peter Hunter	Cr Peter Hunter

P Miller left the meeting 12.07pm.

Motion: That the Board receive communication reports.

D Thurley / D Patterson

Carried

Late Item 6.8

The *Impact of lower inflows on state shares under the Murray-Darling Basin Agreement* report – by the Interim Inspector General

See details in separate email

Recommendation: That the board

- a. Note the report
- b. Prepare a response from the MDA.

D Thurley emphasised the importance for board members to provide feedback.

J MacAllister suggested that the MDA record the recommendations for the MDBA and incorporate them into the MDA's MOU with the MDBA.

Close 12.11pm.

7. CLOSE