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MEDIA RELEASE

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Murray Darling Association response to Four Corners report

The Murray Darling Association has renewed its call for local government to be given a voice in the implementation of the Basin Plan to support the continuing implementation and avoid a repeat of the problems revealed in last night's Four Corners report.

The report asserted that billions of litres of water purchased by the Commonwealth for the environment have been pumped from the Barwon-Darling system into private dams in line with New South Wales Government water extraction rules.

In the wake of the report the MDA, which represents over 100 member councils across the Basin, has made a renewed push for local government to be afforded a long-overdue formal role in informing decisions on the implementation of the Basin Plan.

MDA chairman Cr David Thurley said the best way to ensure local knowledge informed the decisions that affected local communities was to give the association a seat on the Basin Officials Committee.

"Our local communities and councils across the Basin have worked hard and borne the pain of adjusting to reduced allocations," he said.

"They have been aware of the anomalies and irregularities that affect their local areas for a long time, and have sought to be heard.

"Our local government members in the far west of NSW are today feeling vindicated that their concerns were not misplaced, and are looking forward to working together with their state and federal counterparts, with the irrigators and farmers in their communities, and with local government across the Basin to ensure the Basin Plan is implemented, and that rules are applied in a fair and equitable way."

Mayor of Broken Hill City Council, chairing council of MDA's Region 4, Cr Darriea Turley added "It was painful to watch what has been allowed to happen and the impact our communities have suffered. In recent years we have been made to look ungrateful for a pipeline that is totally unnecessary if the water was allowed to flow down the Darling River instead of being illegally taken.

"Our community is outraged, and call for those involved in any wrongdoing to be held accountable. My heartfelt thanks to the Philip O'Connor, Mayor of Brewarrina and the former public servants for their

commitment and honesty for helping to bring this story to the public arena and to our local community for their ongoing strength and passion.”

MDA chief executive officer Emma Bradbury said the issues identified in the Four Corners report were those of compliance and enforcement of rules under the relevant water sharing plan.

“These matters will no doubt be considered by the responsible authorities to determine whether further action is appropriate,” she said.

“It is important that rigorous checks and balances are in place, and that effective compliance and enforcement activities enable the community to have faith in the Basin Plan, and in the state-run water sharing plans that support its implementation.”

Ms Bradbury said rules for water allocation, access and extraction were governed by water resource plans, with the Basin Plan requiring that by July 2019 all Basin water resources are to be covered by plans approved by the MDBA to ensure that the sustainable diversion limits are achieved.

“There are 36 water resource plan areas across the Basin. Clearly, not every plan has the settings right, and work to complete the plans must continue,” she said.

Ms Bradbury said the matters raised in the Four Corners report did not compromise the integrity of the Basin Plan, but emphasised the need for communities and all levels of government to work together and stay the course.

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