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## MEDIA RELEASE

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### Murray-Darling turf war is strangling communities

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The never ending turf war in the Murray-Darling Basin is strangling local communities, and Basin governments need to follow the lead of a range of local government, community, industry, and environmental groups working to put the Basin's future above politics.

Murray Darling Association CEO Emma Bradbury said many industry, environment, community and First nation groups the MDA works with share the concern that time is running out to protect the health of the Murray-Darling, to support local communities, and lay the groundwork for a sustainable agriculture sector that can securely feed and clothe Australians into the future.

“Over recent months the MDA has been working not only with local government but with a range of groups representing farmers, irrigators, First Nations people, science and environmentalists. We have been finding that even among these diverse groups there is an increasing willingness to work together to build consensus.

“What we have seen is that these groups and others are all willing to listen to each other and find common ground.

“The old style of politics isn't working. There are challenging times ahead, especially as we rebuild after the COVID-19 pandemic,” Ms Bradbury said. “If we don't build a consensus and do what is good for the river and the region as a whole, then we have failed ourselves and all Australians. There will be ghost towns across the Basin.

“It's time for all governments to work together and to listen to local communities, communities that have borne the brunt of a severe drought and bushfires and now have to try to plan their futures. Communities whose experience of water buybacks has had devastating impact. Communities who must rely on the River Murray for basics such as drinking water. And communities who rely on a healthy river for their livelihoods – not just in agriculture but in all the jobs up and down the system.” National President Cr David Thurley OAM added.

The plea for action comes as speakers gather next month for the 76<sup>th</sup> Murray Darling Association national conference *Local Leadership: A National Priority* to discuss how a healthy Murray Darling Basin can support thriving communities, economic development and sustainable productivity.

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Ms Bradbury said more than 20 separate government agencies were involved in deciding how water is used in the Basin – yet the people who make the Basin their home still had little say in their own future.

“We can’t ignore that our land is getting hotter and drier and that our river is coming under more pressure than ever before. As much as we need rain, we need leadership.”

In addition to the Murray Darling Basin Plan, which oversees how much water is released from the river system to water livestock and irrigated farms, Ms Bradbury said there were four major national plans that must work together to decide the Basin’s fate:

- The National Water Infrastructure Development Fund to identify and build water infrastructure to store and deliver water to farms with minimum waste and evaporation.
- Australian Agriculture’s plan for a \$100 billion industry, supporting Basin farmers to grow and innovate.
- The National Energy Plan, including Snowy 2.0, to deliver a 40 per cent boost in the production of cleaner, more reliable energy.
- The National Climate Resilience and Adaptation Strategy to enable our people, environment, and economy to survive and thrive through climate extremes.

“This is not just about how we use our water in a good year or a bad year. If governments and communities don’t work together to get this right, it could compromise our food production, and the river and communities that sustain 2.6 million Australians,” Ms Bradbury said.

“The future of our Basin is not certain. In order for our communities to thrive in the face of change, our national plans and priorities must work together. And work for us.

“If those plans can’t work together, we run a very real risk of whole communities being decimated. We cannot afford to fail.”

The *Local Leadership: A National Priority* conference, co-hosted by the City of Greater Shepparton, will be held virtually from September 14 to September 16. Speakers include: Deputy Prime Minister Michael McCormack; federal Water Minister Keith Pitt; Prof Tim Flannery; author and native crop advocate Bruce Pascoe; National Farmers’ Federation President Fiona Simson; National Water Grid Authority CEO Brendan McRandle; Murray Darling Basin Authority CEO Phillip Glyde; Australian Competition and Consumer Commission Deputy Chair Mick Keogh, and many more.

For more information on the conference and to register please go to [www.mda.asn.au](http://www.mda.asn.au)