



Chief Executive Officer's Report

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1. Introduction

In addition to ‘business as usual’ issues, we have been focusing on key deliverables, including:

- Membership
- Executing, reporting, and finalising ‘Circular Economy’ projects
- Preparing, organising, and delivering MDA conference and AGM
- Working on financials
- Following up on previous motions and preparing motions for the AGM
- Ongoing advocacy

2. Membership

We are continuing to drive membership whenever and wherever possible and have conducted several membership campaigns to non members. However, membership of a council usually results from formal face to face meetings and follow up.

The MDA strives to meet with non-members whenever the opportunity allows. Recently, we had meetings with LGA’s in various parts of the basin and the feedback has been very positive and resulted in several councils joining, with more to come. We also received similar feedback from Queensland Councils after the Council of Mayors meeting. We are planning to conduct similar visits in other regions, with an ongoing Membership engagement mission is planned for all of the Basin Regions.

3. Advocacy

We have continued to connect with related parties in the water space, both Federally and State based.

Of particular note, the Federal Water Minister, Hon Tanya Plibersek MP, spoke at our 2023 National Conference and there has been ongoing communication following.

We have had follow up calls and had very good discussions about many subjects, including MinCo and recurrent funding for the MDA as well as water buybacks. The Minister very much enjoyed being at the MDA conference and enjoyed meeting many of our members from across the Basin. Minister Plibersek has indicated that her door is open to us and looks forward to further engagement.

We received much media attention following the conference. This is continuing, and we are capitalising on this where appropriate. A number of speaking opportunities have ensued such as the Legalwise Water Symposium and the SW Qld Council of Mayors.

We are continuing to develop relationships with State Ministers and relevant bodies, and we are currently seeking face to face meetings with Ministers and relevant Department heads and entities.

Progressing other 20+ Motions raised at the 2023 AGM, the MDA has taken advocacy in stride, engaging with Government departments via correspondence, meetings, and Report submissions such as to the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water's (DCCEEW) Public consultation to delivering the Murray-Darling Basin Plan in full, as well as the Murray-Darling Basin Authority's 2025 Basin Plan Evaluation following engagement with the Riverina Regional Community Forum.

This progression of Motions and advocacy has led to direct engagement between the DCCEEW, the Minister for the Environment and Water, the MDBA and the MDA, including key references to MDA advocacy in official Government Reports.

4. Partnerships, collaboration, and engagement

We are continuing to work on a range of partnerships such as CSIRO, SQNNSW and One Basin CRC.

Whilst the CSIRO relationship has already provided outcomes, other partnerships are a slower burn. However, feedback has been very positive in terms of the potential of these relationships.

5. CSIRO and the Circular Economy

CSIRO Land and Water has partnered with MDA to investigate and explore a series of strategic growth areas that align with the biggest land and water challenges faced by Australian governments/agencies, industries, and communities. These growth areas will build on capabilities and that of our partners and transform the boundaries of the types of products, research projects and services we might collaborate on.

The CSIRO have identified Repurposing Waste / Circular Economy as a strategic growth area and are interested in validating this with LGA's as a valued partner. The CSIRO would like to understand more about how LGA's work within the repurposing waste / circular economy area within their organisation. They are also keen to hear about any future aspirations they might have in regard to infrastructure solutions they need now and into the future.

“The MDA had achieved in 3 months what would have taken CSIRO years.”

To capture these insights, the MDA has completed a series of meetings that will build towards, and help inform the future of this growth area and ensure the CSIRO can design solutions that are of value for all. We have now successfully completed all requirements of the initial engagement with Local Government Areas and presented our findings to the management of CSIRO.

The MDA's work was very well received by the CSIRO, stating that “the MDA had achieved in 3 months what would have taken CSIRO years. We have developed , and continue to develop, a good working relationship with most of their departments – in particular, the Land and Water Division. Given the interest around managed aquifer recharge, there is potential to partner with CSIRO again regarding this area of work.

Building upon the success of our past work with the CSIRO, the MDA has been engaged with regarding a further project in the Circular Economy field, extending upon the previous work completed in 2022. This project is being developed as we speak, and the MDA is excited to see it to its fruition.

Furthering this, the MDA in partnership with the CSIRO, has met with the Greater Shepparton City Council (GSCC) in November 2023, to further understanding Circular Economy opportunities in local government. Another follow-up meeting with GSCC is planned for 2024.

There is the potential to conduct further work with CSIRO departments which we are continuing to explore!

In addition to the above projects, we are providing consultancy to an organisation that is working in the Circular Economy.

6. Key Meetings and Engagements

Date	Event/meeting	Location
8/11/2023	DPE: Non-Urban Water Metering review- Peak Stakeholder meeting	Held Virtually
9/11/2023	CSIRO: Making it circular – how to close the loop	Held Virtually
9/11/2023	November Peak Group Briefing	Held Virtually
17/11/2023	Presentation to Rural City of Murray Bridge Council	Murray Bridge, SA
21/11/2023	Interview with SCA	Held Virtually
22/11/2024	Interview with 2AY Radio Albury	Held Virtually
22/11/2023	Meeting with PSTR Group Pty Ltd, Albury City Council	Albury, NSW
22/11/2023	Meeting with National Irrigators Council	Held Virtually
28/11/2023 – 29/11/2023	Community Engagement Sessions	Narromine, NSW
29/11/2023	Meeting with Southern Kuya	Held Virtually
29/11/2023	Virtual Event: Data-centric AI with the Responsible AI Network and Standards Australia	Held Virtually
1/12/2023	Meeting with SRC, RSV	Melbourne, VIC
1/12/2023	SQNNSW Innovation Hub Members & Partners Forum	Held Virtually
5/12/2023	Meeting: Riverina Regional Community Forum	Held Virtually
12/12/2023	DCCEEW Webinar: Restoring our Rivers Update	Held Virtually
4/1/2024	Meeting with Southern Kuya	Held Virtually
3/1/2024	Meeting with InPipe Energy	Held Virtually
17/1/2024	VIC State Water Minister: Basin Plan Forum	Shepparton, VIC
18/1/2024	VIC State Water Minister: Basin Plan Forum	Echuca, VIC
24/1/2024	Meeting with Matthew Selinsky	Albury, NSW
1/2/2024	Meeting with PSTR Group PTY LTD	Adelaide, SA
15/2/2024	MDBA meeting: Basin Plan Evaluation Information Session	Held Virtually
19/2/2024	DCCEEW meeting: Draft framework to deliver the 450GL of environmental water	Held Virtually
28/2/2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meeting with the Hon Tanya Plibersek MP Meeting with Sen. Perin Davey 	Canberra, ACT
1/3/2024	Presentation to the Legalwise Water Law Symposium	Sydney, NSW

7. 80th National Conference and AGM

The feedback from our 79th National Conference has been very positive.

We were able to secure the key speakers we wanted as well as relevant sponsors. The number of delegates was in excess of 150. Sponsorships were particularly pleasing, and we secured 2 platinum sponsors as well as a dinner sponsor. Overall, we were very pleased with the result. In addition, we made a positive contribution to our financial position.

Looking forward, I am pleased to officially launch the webpage and invite you to the **Murray Darling Association's 80th National Conference and AGM** to be held **8th~11th July, 2024** in **Tamworth, NSW**. The proposed theme is: "The future of Water Security".

This exciting event will bring together leaders and decision makers from across the Murray-Darling Basin, and will be a wonderful opportunity to meet again, face to face.

Tamworth is a thriving regional city and is the heart of the New England region. It's a destination for family fun, outdoor adventure, foodie delights, the arts and heritage, plus so much more!

Renowned for its laid-back lifestyle, incredible landscapes and generous hospitality, Tamworth is where rich heritage meets outdoor adventure, arts and culture complement luxury, and sports intersect action and fun!

The Australian Equine and Livestock Events Centre on the city's southern outskirts hosts horse-related events. Nearby is the Big Golden Guitar centre with its giant guitar statue, music store and wax museum. The central Tamworth Regional Gallery houses local textiles and art.

The MDA's 80th National Conference & AGM is **your opportunity** to be part of the solution – to join the conversation, to inform future policy, and to engage with the innovators, scientists, educators, and leaders of our time.

Join us in Tamworth and engage in discussion with an incredible line up of speakers and panellists including members from State and Federal Government, Government Departments, Agencies, Authorities, Educators, Basin Leaders, and many more! Come together to tackle the big issues of the Basin and forge a future of connected councils, catchments, and communities.

The program for presenters and guest speakers is well underway and the Planning committee are working on all logistical matters to secure a whole Tamworth tourist experience.

8. Engagement Report on the benefits of membership:

The MDA has been embarking on a membership drive, in order to try to secure new members as well as retain our current membership.

A keen focus has been identified in the Northern Basin, where we want to ensure that the Northern Basin is engaged to its fullest potential. We are pleased to note that our engagement with Councils and entities across the Basin bearing fruit!

With over 167 councils in the MDB, the ongoing partnership between Councils and the Murray Darling Association elevates local and regional issues and priorities to the state and federal level providing national recognition of local priorities.

Membership to the MDA delivers social, economic, and environmental benefits to each community by creating partnerships, participating in events, and accessing networks and services that align with and support all Community plans, in the areas of Community, Environment, Economy and Council.

We know that councils and the local government sector are increasingly resource challenged and are looking for services, relationships and partnerships that assist in achieving your council's and your region's strategic priorities.

Water, land management, energy and community wellbeing are front and centre of almost every council's priorities. A strong relationship between council and the MDA provides opportunities to:

- partner with councils and regional groups in providing local case studies and experience to support regional and national positions and advocacy strategies.
- raise the profile of your council and the local government sector through MDA's partnerships with the Commonwealth.
- present strategically aligned priorities, objectives, and advocacy to state and federal governments.
- leverage regional efficiencies and Basin-scale capability and positions.

Benefits to your community.

The MDA fosters a culture of community collaboration and leadership development to improve social, cultural, environmental, and economic well-being across the Murray-Darling Basin.

Working together with member councils and our regions, we achieve policy change and ensure local knowledge informs the national dialogue on water reform, land management, environmental sustainability, leadership development and education, and regional economic diversification.

Council's participation at MDA region and national meetings builds regional relationships and elevates the community's priorities to the state and federal level, informing decisions and outcomes that impact your local area.

Benefits to your environment.

There is no future on a dry riverbed. At the core of our vision is a strong emphasis on science and education to inform policies for the sustainable management of Basin resources to ensure a healthy and prosperous future.

The MDA's vision, which drives our strategic and operational direction, is for *local government and communities to work together to achieve a healthy, vibrant and thriving Murray-Darling Basin*. As a result, the MDA has:

- Partnered with CSIRO with a focus on science and education to address some of the Basin's toughest challenges.
- Advocated for and represented local government in environmental issues, including floodplain harvesting etc.
- Partnered with Murray-Darling Basin Authority, better supporting local government through information sharing and representation.
- Supported regions to develop Climate Ready Communities statements

Benefits to your economy.

For many, if not all, Basin communities, water security plays an important role in economic growth and sustainability. Through the MDA's regional alignments and partnerships, member councils leverage the value of knowledge sharing across the local government and regional development sectors to peruse water quality, water security and other priorities.

The MDA provides member councils with partnerships that support regional economic development and diversification initiatives.

Benefits to your council.

Our mission is to provide high value services to our members, and their communities by delivering quality projects, events and products create enduring value for Basin communities and governments.

Our achievements

The Murray Darling Association has been successful in shifting policies to better reflect the needs of the Basin communities, and we are continuing to grow our reach and impact as portrayed in our [Vision 2025 Strategic Plan](#).

The relationship between the MDA and our member Councils contributes strongly to the development of the local government sector as a whole and our collective role in ensuring a vibrant, sustainable future for the Murray-Darling Basin.

Mark D. Lamb

Chief Executive Officer