



# Media Release

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## Murray-Darling peak body seeks new CEO

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Cr David Thurley OAM, National President of the Murray Darling Association for local government confirmed today that the peak body representing councils across the Murray Darling Basin is searching for a new chief executive to lead the organisation into the future.

“This is a dynamic and exciting time for the MDA,” Cr Thurley said. “The MDA and local government across the Basin have never been better positioned than we are now to ensure that local leadership is key to informing national policy.”

The announcement comes as no surprise, with long-serving CEO Emma Bradbury quietly signalling her intention to hand the reins over at the end of her current contract as far back as September 2020.

“We will be sad to see Emma go. Her incredible energy and commitment to process has been well recognised. The partnership between our board and Emma has seen the MDA grow from a regional group of councils to a national powerhouse for local government across the Basin communities.”

Ms Bradbury has been in the role since 2014 and says the position has been one of the most challenging, rewarding and privileged in her long and diverse career.

Ms Bradbury leaves the role optimistic for the future of Basin communities, reflecting positively on the shift of governments and communities in navigating water sharing across the Basin states. It is a distinct shift from a combative to a more collaborative approach and one that she has had no small part in leading.

The peak body represents the interests of the more than 170 councils across the Murray-Darling Basin and works with four States and the Commonwealth. It’s a complex job, but Ms Bradbury has always maintained that achieving consensus in this job is not only achievable – done properly, it’s almost unavoidable.

“In reality, the difference between what councils across the Basin states want from water reform is almost indistinguishable. Councils and communities want certainty, stability, economic opportunity, a healthy environment, and a safe, secure water supply for themselves and for their neighbours,” Ms Bradbury said.

“Establishing consensus on water policy is not the unicorn it is perceived to be, nor that it once was. How we achieve those objectives in different regions will of course require different solutions. Those solutions must always be informed by local knowledge. And by sharing that knowledge across the jurisdictions, we build consensus.”

“All water use is legitimate and valid – agricultural water, environmental water, town water, cultural water, water for industry and mining.

*For further information please contact the Murray Darling Association:*

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“I am pleased to see the narrative in water sharing shifting towards a recognition that the prosperity of any one interest group or water use relies on the sustainability of the others, with governments, communities and industry groups now asking, ‘How can we work better together to get the balance right?’”

Asked what the achievements Ms Bradbury is most proud of, she did not hesitate.

“I am immensely proud to have worked in the organisation and with an incredible team of staff and board members to deliver The Basin Communities Leadership Program. This program has been transformational for many communities hit hard by drought, water reform, and changing climate. It has and continues to provide an opportunity for local leaders to identify local solutions and to speak their truth to power.”

Last year, graduates of the program worked with councils across the Basin culminating in a resolution at National Conference that local government develop a process to increase Aboriginal representation in local government and in water policy, an issue Ms Bradbury is passionate about.

Cr Thurley commended Ms Bradbury’s vision during her time in the role.

“The MDA, and local government as a sector is exquisitely poised to put substance to the Commonwealth’s current commitment to put communities at the heart of the Basin Plan. We are keen to find a CEO to take that opportunity and to build on the vision and leadership Emma has shown,” Cr Thurley said.

Former Deputy Prime Minister and Member for Riverina, Michael McCormack, commended Ms Bradbury’s contribution to Murray Darling Basin Communities.

“Emma has been a tireless champion for forging a collaborative approach to the Murray-Darling Basin Plan in an often challenging and highly emotive environment,” Mr McCormack said.

CEO of the Balonne Shire Council, Matthew Magin, said Ms Bradbury had modernised the Murray Darling Association.

“Emma has given the whole organisation a clear sense of purpose and strategic direction which is endorsed and accepted by both state and federal government. Without Emma’s passion, motivation and intellect MDA would not be in the strong position it is today,” Mr Magin said.

Mayor of the Rural City of Murray Bridge, Cr Brenton Lewis, praised Ms Bradbury’s visionary leadership.

“Emma has brought great targeted, strategic management to the Murray Darling Association. She has made a lot of really important connections, fostering cooperative relationships and partnerships at a state and federal level,” Cr Lewis said.

The Director of Land and Water at the CSIRO, Jane Coram, said Ms Bradbury would leave a lasting legacy throughout the Murray Darling Basin.

“Emma has been an inspiring and energising leader for the Murray Darling Association, and I have been privileged to have worked with her,” Ms Coram said.

“Part of her legacy will be the strong partnership between the MDA and the CSIRO that she established, and we look forward to continuing to partner with the MDA in co-developing science-based solutions to the challenges of the Murray Darling Basin.”

Ms Bradbury cites the Collaborative Relationship Agreement between local government and the CSIRO, the first of its kind in Australia as a key achievement during her time in the role.

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“Prosperous and sustainable water sharing in Australia is absolutely dependent on two things,” Ms Bradbury said. “Local leadership and robust, nationally recognised science.

“I am still excited and inspired every day by the opportunities before us, by the plan for the years ahead, and by the people I work with across the Murray-Darling Basin. I look forward to handing the reins on to the next CEO to continue that journey.”

Ms Bradbury will continue to serve the Murray Darling Association until her successor is appointed.

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*If you would like to speak to David Thurley, call 0419 510 274.*

*If you would like to speak with Emma Bradbury, call 0429 905 017.*