

Inquiry into the 2022 Flood Event in Victoria - MDA Submission -

**Murray Darling Association Inc.
Contact: Mark Lamb
Chief Executive Officer**



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Context

- The Murray Darling Association is a membership-based peak representative organisation representing local government and communities across the Murray-Darling Basin since 1944.
- The Murray Darling Association membership base is divided into 12 Regions across the Murray-Darling Basin, advocating on behalf of 172 Local Government Areas.
 - Region 2, Region 3, and Region 4 represent the voices of 35 Victorian Local Government Areas, and 8 NSW Local Government Areas within the Murray-Darling Basin.
 - Region 2 is chaired by the Greater Shepparton City Council
 - Region 3 is currently not chaired by a council. Councils within Region 3 are currently represented by Regions 2 and 4.
 - Region 4 is chaired by the Mildura Rural City Council
- More information about the Murray Darling Association can be found via www.mda.asn.au



Executive Summary

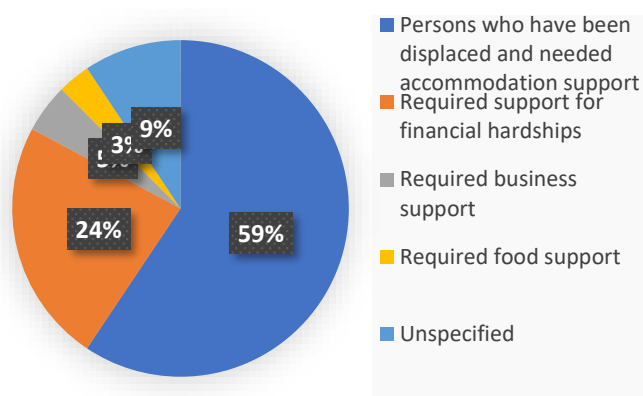
Many Member Councils across Region 2, 3, and 4 indicated that they were greatly affected by the 2022 Flood event, causing social and economic distress in the communities. The Social and economic distress includes influence from loss of income for businesses, loss/diversion of tourism during peak, and holiday periods, and loss of personal goods and property.

Following the flood event, in the Greater Shepparton region alone more than 6,000 houses were assessed, with more than 20% of these needing a secondary assessment. The Greater Shepparton region identified that they experienced severe flooding from numerous directions due to local topography and geography.

The MDA Region 4 identified that floodwater from the Darling River flowing into the Murray River at Wentworth held the Murray River flow back and increased the width of the water spreading over floodplains in the region. Region 4 Member Councils also noted that the flows through the Greater Murray-Darling Basin system delivered the biggest floods in 50 years for Mildura and South Australia.

The Mildura Rural City Council's Community Relief and Support Service indicated that as of 14/12/2022 they had received 64 referrals regarding community and business support.

In the region surrounding Mildura there was an estimated 50 homes and 15 businesses evacuated during the flood event (peaking at 38.4 AHD). Region 4 noted that the number of homes and businesses immediately impacted by the floods was smaller than what was seen in other MDA Regions due to favourable topography and geography, as well as a concentrated populations in Mildura, Merbein, and Red Cliffs.



Topography, geography, and Mildura's location along the Murray River allowed the community to take more time in flood preparation (including notifying and preparing the community, the implementation of an internal flood response control group, and the removal or preparation of Council facilities that may be impacted by the floodwater). As a result, the greatest identified impact to the Mildura Region was noted as the economic impact onset by the loss of tourism to the region, in particular during the month of December.

Mildura Rural City Council indicated that, while working with council partners, they became aware of an increase in mental health referrals from residents and business owners, while its Community Relief and Support Service fielded 130 enquiries from the community throughout the flood event.

Addressing Social recovery, a large part of the Mildura Council's initial focus had been on ensuring identified flood-impacted properties were contacted, assessed, and supported – covering commercial, farming, and residential, to help get them back onto their properties quickly and safely.

In terms of built environment, the initial massive task was taking stock of the impact on our roads, facilities and public spaces and then prioritising reinstatement or repair works.

In terms of economic recovery, Mildura Rural City Council indicated that this would be a longer-term challenge, with a focus on event-led recovery and attracting visitors to the region.

Mildura Rural City Council has indicated that they are exploring an opportunity to develop a study with the DEWLP to analyse levies within the region



Greater Shepparton City Council – Retrospective Report

Within the borders of the MDA's Region 2, all Local Government Areas had indicated that they had been affected by the 2022 Flood event, which has led to much social and economic distress with more than 6,000 houses assessed for flood damage in the Local Government Area of the Greater Shepparton City Council alone as of 6 March 2023, of which, more than 20% needed a secondary impact assessment.

With unprecedented flooding being a feature throughout the Murray-Darling Basin, the Goulburn River and outfalls from Lake Eildon did not spare the greater Shepparton Region.

The Local Government Area around Shepparton came under threat from floodwater from several directions, with water coming from the Broken, and Goulburn Rivers, as well as Seven and Castle creeks.

Particularly in Shepparton during the flood event, and afterwards, the Council focussed on a proactive approach to engage with the community, with the Mayor and councillors utilising social media to broaden their ability to reach during a period where face-to-face engagement was difficult.



Mildura Rural City Council – Retrospective Report

As of the 13/12/2022 the Murray River had been steadily rising in and around the Mildura Region for 8 weeks.

The region had had time to prepare for the flood because of the size of the Murray below the Edward/Wakool and the Murrumbidgee, as well as the time it took to move through the system, noting that the flooding Darling joining the Murray at Wentworth held the Murray flow back and increased the width of the water spreading over floodplains. The flows through the Greater Murray Darling Basin System had delivered Mildura and South Australia the Biggest Floods in 50 years.

As of 3pm 14/12/2022, The Mildura Rural City Council's Community Relief and Support Service had received 64 referrals. Of these referrals:

- 38 were for people who had been displaced and needed accommodation support,
- 15 required support for financial hardship,
- 3 required business support, and
- 2 required food support.
- 6 were unspecified.

It was the first time since the well documented 1956 flood that Mildura and the region had received a daily flow of over 200GL. This was unique in a working River having all tributaries delivering very high end of system flows to fill the very large Mid and Lower Murray River.

The ICC and SES along with Mildura Rural City Council had been methodically building and reinforcing levies over the last month to protect houses and businesses. There had been a series of community meeting to keep all living along the edge of the river and flood plains informed. This had worked well but there were ongoing concerns with the high river expected to stay for another 6 to 8 weeks applying wear and tear to all levies and infrastructure. All land and homeowners had worked tirelessly to protect their properties.

During the floods residents in Mildura, Merbein, and Irymple were asked to reduce non-essential water use.

Following the flood event, Mildura Rural City Council was in discussion to undergo a study and work with DEWLP to analyse the levies.

The Mildura Rural City Council had also engaged with upstream communities who had worked through flood issues and past on relevant information. Mildura and the region anticipated that around 50 homes and 15 businesses would be evacuated during the flood event, with a flood peak at 38.4 AHD, just a tick over 200GL.

Mildura was built on high land, this gave Mildura, Merbein, and Red Cliffs great security from big rivers. It also had a secondary benefit, allowing for safely viewing the encroaching floods from Riverfronts and high lookouts.

The increase in local Flood tourism had been huge with many locals coming to see the event and talk about previous floods and their memories of them. Mildura had many businesses receive cancellations because of the state-wide evacuation messaging.

Flood related messaging is something that and should be addressed as flooding is often regional and specific to the geography/topography of the land and, depending on the severity of the flood event may leave communities unaffected. Mildura Rural City Council acknowledged that communicate this



in difficult circumstances would be hard to balance sensible flood warnings, as well as informing the broader community that not every business and home in the region, was in immediate danger.

Flood Preparation - Mildura

Mildura's position on the Murray River, downstream of many of the other flood-impacted areas provided several important benefits:

- More time to plan and either remove or prepare Council and public facilities that may potentially be impacted by the floods:
 - Mildura Council was able to decommission or protect major public facilities and sites, such as our Water Play Park and our Nowingi Place soundshell equipment well ahead of the height of the flood event, minimising damage, but also ensuring a quicker recovery.
 - Mildura Council teams were out making early assessments of potential high-risk and high-impact areas as early as September.
 - Mildura Council was better able to prepare for road closures, including identifying flood-prone roads, and then plan a timeline for their closure.
 - Mildura Council was able to do early planning and analysis of flood prone areas, which allowed better preparation in terms of planning for levee works and other measures.
- More time to ensure the community was informed and prepared:
 - Mildura Council set up a dedicated flood information page on our website in early October, well over two months before the height of the flood event. This page was our community's primary source of flood-related information and warnings and used as a resource for a host of other agencies involved in the flood response.
 - Mildura Council held/supported a series of community meetings across our municipality from early November, in conjunction with agencies including the Victoria State Emergency Service, Mallee Catchment Management Authority and Victoria Police. There were more than a dozen of these in-person community meetings.
- Mildura Council was able to learn from the experiences of other local government areas upstream in terms of potential challenges and solutions.
- Mildura Council was able to establish their own internal flood response control group very early ensuring better coordination and preparedness.
- Mildura Council indicated that by the time the Incident Control Centre was established in early November (Nov 7), it was a well-oiled machine, having operated in a host of centres further upstream.



The impact of the flood - Mildura

Due to Mildura's geography, and the concentration of its population, the direct impacts of the flooding were contained to several specific areas, rather than broader direct impacts across the municipality, which had been seen in some other municipalities.

Due to the timing of the flood event, peaking in mid-to-late December, it had a significant impact on Mildura's tourism sector, and therefore the broader economy.

Working with Council partner agencies, Mildura Rural City Council was aware that more recently there had been a major uptick in mental health referrals, and not just residents with many coming from business owners impacted.

Perceptions outside of the district that the Mildura region was 'closed for business', given the broader impacts seen in other flood-impacted areas, which further hurt the Council's tourism sector leading into Christmas.

Road access was also a significant impact, which directly impacted public areas, businesses, and residents – it either blocked access totally, or meant significant diversions.

Mildura's Community Relief and Support Service fielded 130 enquiries from the community throughout the flood event.

To provide some idea of the impact, looking specifically at residential properties, based on the ICC's aerial intelligence gathering during the height of the flood event, Mildura Rural City Council initially identified 48 residential properties classed as inundated across the MRCC area.

Next Steps: Recovery Planning - Mildura

As of 22/2/23 Mildura Rural City Council indicated that they were well and truly down the recovery path, having started our recovery planning well before river levels started receding:

- Established dedicated recovery working groups (multi-agency groups) addressing social recovery, economic recovery and built environment recover in 2022.

In terms of social recovery, a large part of the initial focus had been on ensuring identified flood-impacted properties were contacted, assessed, and supported – covering commercial, farming, and residential, to help get them back onto their properties quickly and safely.

- This included conducting Secondary Impact Assessments, which have now largely been completed on residential and commercial properties.
- Flood waste removal had been another task, arranging for kerbside and on-property flood waste collection for those unable to do so. Also offering free waste disposal at Mildura Landfill.

In terms of built environment, the initial massive task was taking stock of the impact on our roads, facilities and public spaces and then prioritising reinstatement or repair works.

- Mildura was well advanced in that space in terms of opening roads, more than half of the roads that were closed have now been reopened.



- Mildura Council was still working through the process of assessing and reopening public facilities and spaces.
- An identified challenge had been balancing public pressure with Mildura Council's ability to reopen prominent roads and facilities.

In terms of economic recovery, Mildura Rural City Council indicated that this would be a longer-term challenge.

- Focus on an events-led recovery given the region's traditional reliance and reputation as a major events destination, which will attract visitors.
- Attracting visitors is beneficial on several different fronts:
 - Broader economic benefit through spending in local businesses
 - Targeted benefit to the tourism industry in particular – which was among the hardest hit by the flood event.
 - Good for social wellbeing of the community bringing major events to the Mildura region.
- Working with the Victorian Government to hopefully attract a series of major events to the Mildura region in coming months.

