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MEDIA RELEASE

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A new approach puts local communities at the heart of the Basin Plan

The Murray Darling Association has welcomed the Federal Government's overhaul of the Murray-Darling Basin water buyback scheme as a win for local communities and for the environment.

National Water Minister Keith Pitt has today announced a new approach to the implementation of the Basin Plan, with cancellation of buyback, and a new approach to compliance at the cornerstone of a suite of new announcements.

"The buyback scheme had the best intentions, but as a means of achieving sustainable environmental water recovery it didn't work. It created division, pitting communities and the environment against each other," Murray Darling Association CEO Emma Bradbury said today.

"The two greatest challenges to the implementation of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan were policies that recovered water for the environment at a direct cost to community wellbeing, and disjointed oversight that eroded local confidence in the Plan. Today's announcement goes a long way to addressing those two key issues," Ms Bradbury said.

The MDA, which is the peak group for local councils in the Murray Darling Basin, has long been working for the environmental buyback scheme to be cancelled, with water instead saved through greater efficiencies and more effective project planning and infrastructure investment.

"Today's announcement heralds a step-change in the way our leadership is approaching the implementation the Basin Plan, and a tangible commitment to action in achieving stronger outcomes for the community and the environment," said Ms Bradbury, who sat on the advisory group to the Productivity Commission's Murray-Darling Basin Plan: Five-year assessment in 2018.

That assessment, presented at the MDA's 74th National Conference, recommended that the Murray-Darling Basin Authority be restructured to separate its service delivery and its regulatory (compliance) functions into two institutions.

The MDA has also welcomed the announcement that the Inspector-General of Murray-Darling Basin Water Resources will assume responsibility for the revamped scheme under the new title Inspector-General of Water Compliance.

For more information, contact Emma Bradbury on 0429 905 017 or e.bradbury@mda.asn.au

“We need to change the way we manage our water, and while we look forward to seeing more detail, this announcement is a positive step forward,” Ms Bradbury said.

As much as the buyback scheme had its flaws, any new approach to recovering water for the environment must maintain the integrity of restoring a healthy working Murray-Darling Basin system.

“The MDA works with councils, communities, groups and individuals representing farmers, irrigators, First Nations people, scientists, environmentalists and government. We have been finding that even among these diverse groups there is an increasing willingness to work together to build consensus.”

In addition to the Murray Darling Basin Plan, there are four major national priorities that must work together to decide future of the Murray-Darling Basin:

- The National Water Infrastructure Grid must plan and invest wisely to deliver a sustainable future into the 21st century.
- Australian agriculture’s plan must support Basin farmers and industry to grow and innovate.
- The National Energy Plan, including Snowy 2.0 is essential to our productive future, and
- The National Climate Resilience and Adaptation Strategy must support our communities to respond to the changes in weather and water availability.

“This is not just about how we use our water in a good year or a bad year. Government and communities must continue to work together, to get these national plans and priorities working together, and to make local leadership a national priority,” Ms Bradbury said. “We look forward to local government taking a more active role as the Minister places communities at the centre of the Basin Plan.”

Minister for Water The Hon Keith Pitt MP will be speaking this month at the Murray Darling Association’s national conference, joining high-level speakers representing the environment, farming and energy interests.

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 also include: Deputy Prime Minister Michael McCormack; 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 for the conference please go to www.mda.asn.au