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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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MDA can help deliver the Plan

LOCAL governments need to be a part of the decision-making process in the continuing implementation of the Murray Darling Basin Plan.

This is the key message of the Murray Darling Association – whose membership includes more than 100 of the 167 municipalities that are based within the Basin, with memberships increasing.

The association's national president, David Thurley and chief executive officer, Emma Bradbury spent four days in Canberra last week to update key decision makers on Basin issues affecting municipalities across four States.

The pair met with key Murray Darling Basin Authority figures, the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder and politicians – including Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce, and Opposition Leader Bill Shorten, - to ensure that local government, as a responsible authority and the third level of government in Australia, is represented at the State and Federal level in the decision-making processes that impacts local communities.

“The Basin Plan impacts different communities and industries in different ways,” Cr Thurley said.

“The best way our state and federal governments to make informed decisions, recognising the complex needs of communities across the Basin is to include local government in that process.”

The pair attended 16 meetings and engagements, highlighting to all sides of politics and the MDBA that local government has a valuable contribution to make in supporting our State and Federal counterparts.

“Effective community engagement is vital to the successful implementation of the Plan, and to the long-term planning and ongoing management of Basin resources,” Cr Thurley said

“The meetings gave us the chance to say that local government, as the third level of government in Australia and the one most directly connected to the communities we serve is vital to understanding the social and economic impacts felt by our local communities.”

“The Murray Darling Association is a fabulous resource to use. We are the only organisation to represent councils across the entire Basin – from the headwaters of the Murray and the Northern catchments in Queensland, through to the lower lakes and the Coorong in South Australia.

“It is import to include the views of local government when Basin management decisions are made. “If organisations want to get the decisions right and to stop any backlash occurring, involve us in the process.”

Unlike the Federal and State governments that operate nationally, local government has no parliament through which to collaborate on issues – a view both Cr Thurley and Ms Bradbury stressed at each engagement.

“Regional and joint organisations of councils play an important role in this space, but the MDA is the only coalition of local governments that provides a forum for regional and interstate collaboration and information sharing on Basin issues,” Ms Bradbury said.

“The MDA is the voice of local government in the Basin, and local government is the voice of their communities.”

Talks with the MDBA also looked at closer collaboration between both organisations to make greater use if that network.

“A Memorandum of Understanding does exist between our association and the Murray Darling Basin Authority, and we need make best use of that opportunity,” Cr Thurley said.

Outcomes from discussions will be passed onto the association’s 12 regions, which will help formulate recommendations to be discussed at October’s National Conference and Annual Meeting in Renmark, South Australia.

The Our Plan, Our Future conference is the MDA’s 73rd annual conference - occurring from Wednesday, October 11 to Friday, October 13 in Renmark – and will look at the changing environment of the Basin and ways communities can engage with new industries and adapt to the changes.

“The challenge for our state and federal leaders is a more complete engagement of local communities through the MDA. The challenge for local government is to better inform our state and federal counterparts, and to capture opportunities to support their local communities. The MDA can help deliver the Plan.” Ms Bradbury said.

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For more information, please contact MDA national president, David Thurley (0419 510 274) or chief executive officer, Emma Bradbury (0429 905 017).