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## PRESS RELEASE

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### For Immediate Release

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#### **Barham community meeting to discuss the Senate Inquiry into the MDB Plan. 8 July 2015**

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The community meeting in Barham yesterday, attended by more than 1000 concerned community members, was a pivotal moment for landholders and communities affected by the implementation of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan.

Those crossbench Senators tasked with undertaking a Senate enquiry into the Basin Plan were in attendance to hear community concerns. Senator John Madigan, Independent Senator for Victoria who has advocated for the review was joined by Senator David Leyonheilm Liberal Senator for NSW, who will chair the committee, and Senator Bob Day Family First Senator for South Australia.

Other Senators and parliamentarians also in attendance included Dr Sharman Stone MP, Member for Murray, who has long advocated for social and economic considerations to be prioritised; Senator Dio Wang of Palmer United Party Senator, Senator Sam Dastiari ALP Senator for NSW, Bob Katter, Member for Kennedy, and Peter Walsh, Member for Murray Plains

Arranged by Senator John Madigan and local farmers and MDA members Lindsay Schultz, John Bradford and John Lolicato, in association with the Murray Darling Association, the meeting provided the opportunity for a remarkably intimate discussion between our community and the parliament.

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*For conservation and sustainable development*

The message was united and powerful: there must be balance, delivering on the triple bottom line under the implementation of the Basin Plan.

Chairman of the Murray Darling Association, Cr Greg Toll was elated with the attendance at the event, and emphasised the importance of the current review. “We genuinely appreciated the time our elected members have taken to come and listen to the community,” he said. “This review will be an opportunity to address the terrible disregard for balancing social and economic outcomes with those of the environment under the Basin Plan”.

Presenters spoke of the detrimental impacts on local communities including limited education opportunities due to diminishing school enrolments; families leaving rural areas; mental health impacts; uncertainty for farmers; and agricultural productivity decline.

Cr Toll spoke of the importance of ensuring intergenerational continuity of farming in rural Australia. “Travelling around the Basin and visiting farms and local communities, it is clear that our farmers are getting older. Young people are not coming back to the land, and we need to decide whether we want our rural communities to continue to exist as we know them.”

The disregard of community input at all stages of the plan’s development and implementation has been a consistent theme since well before the adoption of the Plan in 2012.

As far back as 2011 Professor John Briscoe, engaged by the MDBA to participate in the development of the basin plan, was scathing in his report on the Plan prior to its release. Noting that the environment was given legal primacy at the expense of social and economic considerations, Professor Briscoe urged the government to listen to the community. “Australia cannot find its way in water management if this act is its guide” he said at the time.

A key issue raised by the Murray Darling Association, after consultation with members, is the impact of the separation of water from land. “Unbundling” has led to speculators and superannuation funds entering the market and setting an increase of prices and must be changed. The MDA believe that if we are to be a productive nation water must be re-attached to land. Cr Toll emphasised the point, saying “We must ensure that the government works to secure the future of agriculture in the Basin, for the benefit of all Australians”.

Community members were urged to make a submission to the enquiry, with details on how to do that to be provided in due course.

We invite those who would like to provide feedback on the meeting and be part of the continuing conversation to make a submission to the MDA via email, to [admin@mda.asn.au](mailto:admin@mda.asn.au) or by post to, PO Box 1268, Echuca Vic 3564.

Submissions may be discussed at our National Conference, to be held in Barooga on 9 September, 2015. Please check our website for updates [www.mda.asn.au](http://www.mda.asn.au).  
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