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Media release

For immediate release

Solidarity characterises Murray Darling Association National Conference and AGM

A RECORD number of voting delegates from right across the Basin attended the Murray Darling Association's 73rd National Conference and AGM in Renmark last week.

More than 140 mayors, councillors, officers and community members from the MDA's 12 regions came together to discuss the status of the Murray-Darling Basin and the role of local government in planning for a future with less water.

More than 25 presenters took to the stage throughout the conference to talk on their Basin-related areas of expertise.

Attendees heard from those charged with leading the delivery of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan, including Murray-Darling Basin Authority Chairman Neil Andrew and Chief Economist Colin Mues, along with South Australian Water Minister Ian Hunter and Federal Assistant Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources Anne Ruston.

Agriculture and future opportunities under new water sharing rules were major talking points, with presentations from the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources' Paul Morris and Almond Board of Australia Chairman Neale Bennett.

There were also updates on projects such as the National Carp Control Plan and Snowy 2.0, along with panel discussions on opportunities for adjustment to local economies under the Plan, and the role of the barrages in achieving Basin Plan targets.

The barrages discussion highlighted broad solidarity among delegates, who expressed admiration for South Australians in their commitment to preventing the river from dying from the mouth up.

Another point of discussion throughout the conference was the lack of community confidence in the Basin Plan, made worse by recent allegations of non-compliance by some irrigators in the Northern Basin and an apparent lack of regulatory action.

MDA National President Cr David Thurley stated in his opening address that the Association remained firmly in support of full implementation of the Basin Plan, but believed there needed to be greater integrity and accountability.

“The challenge is to build trust in the Basin Plan by elevating the role of local government to ensure local knowledge is actually put to use.”

The MDA’s Annual General Meeting was held on day two of the conference, with numerous important motions put up for discussion.

Delegates agreed unanimously to continue to push for meaningful inclusion of local government in Basin-related decision-making processes, including in the development of Water Resource Plans.

They also supported a motion expressing the MDA’s support for all current inquiries into aspects of the Basin Plan’s implementation, while maintaining the Association’s call for an independent public inquiry to restore community confidence.

Several motions affecting Lower Darling communities were passed, including for the MDA to call on the NSW Government to place a moratorium on the Wentworth to Broken Hill Water Pipeline and release the business case underpinning project.

Other motions passed related to independent auditing of the MDBA’s compliance regime, the importance of river flows to tourism and the availability of timely flood information for river communities.

Gunnedah Shire Council Mayor, Cr Jamie Chaffey from Region 11 of the MDA was among many delegates who believed the conference highlighted the way forward for local government in the Murray-Darling Basin.

“I was impressed by the level of common ground between local government representatives from right across the Basin. That solidarity means local government is well placed to have a role informing the implementation of the Basin Plan,” Cr Chaffey said.

The 74th National Conference and AGM will be held in Leeton late next year.

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For more information, contact MDA CEO Emma Bradbury on 0429 905 017 or Cr David Thurley on 0419 510 274. All Region Chairs are also available to discuss the conference.

Contact information for the Chairs of the Murray Darling Association

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