



admin@mda.asn.au
www.mda.asn.au
T (03) 5480 3805
ABN: 64 636 490 493

463 High Street
P.O. Box 1268
Echuca, Vic 3564

3rd Floor, 553 Kiewa Street
P.O. Box 359
Albury, NSW 2640

Friday, 13 April 2018

The Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on the Environment and Energy
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Email: environment.reps@aph.gov.au

To the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity for the Murray Darling Association (MDA) to provide this submission to the Inquiry into the Management and Use of Environmental Water, being conducted by the Standing Committee on the Environment and Energy.

The Murray Darling Association is the peak body for local government across the Murray-Darling Basin. There are 167 councils that sit within the Basin and whose communities rely upon water from within the catchment. The efficient, equitable and sustainable management and use of environmental water is a matter that is of significant interest to local government.

The Committee has called for submissions that will assist in their consideration of four key issues. Broadly, the Murray Darling Association believes greater consultation, collaboration, and work with local government is required on all four issues.

1. Maximising the use of environmental water for the protection and restoration of environmental assets.

Environmental water is essential to the health, wellbeing and sustainability of the Murray-Darling Basin system and the communities within it.

MDA member councils keenly acknowledge the numerous benefits of environmental water to land and water ecosystems and support the legislation that ensures provision of such volumes of water as may be sufficient to maintain the health of that environment.

The impacts of environmental watering events are complex and differ from wetland to wetland, community to community and government to government.

The MDA acknowledges the importance of the role of the CEWO and our state based natural resource management agencies in administering complex legislation and managing the use of environmental

water. The MDA and its member councils have always valued a constructive and respectful relationship with the CEWO.

Formal inclusion of local government through the MDA – along with local land services, catchment management authorities and CEWO local engagement officers - in the planning for environmental watering would foster greater public confidence in environmental watering and maximise the use and benefit of environmental water for the protection and restoration of environmental assets.

Environmental water management could be enhanced by greater investment in and reliance on local knowledge to develop solutions to unintended and adverse consequences inherent in environmental watering events.

These consequences include the proliferation of carp spawning associated with overbank flows, overwatering of redgum forests, cold water pollution, and accelerated river bank undermining and degradation associated with river pulses.

2. Considering innovative approaches for the use of environmental water.

- Carp management - The volume of carp currently exceeds 80 per cent of the biomass in the river system and is a known contributor to poor health in the river system, and an impediment to realising the full value of environmental water and the efficiency of its use.

The Fisheries and Research Development Corporation is currently preparing the National Carp Control Plan, which is considering the release of a biological control measure.

The MDA recommends that environmental water be invested in research and development to support this initiative.

- Collaboration on state based and philanthropic initiatives such as the NSW Government - OEH River Connections program for the Environmental Trust.
- Greater involvement by the CEWH in the development and communication of the business cases and environmental impact assessments for the suite of supply and efficiency projects proposed under the Murray Darling Basin Plan sustainable diversion limit adjustment mechanism. These projects are intended enable the more efficient use of environmental water.
- The MDA supports investment in works and measures and recommends active consultation with local government to ensure these investments, like the water they are managing, deliver maximum benefit to the local communities.
- Research and development - Investment in research to enhance energy efficiencies and management of environmental water.
- Work with local government through the Murray Darling Association in the development of evidence-based resources to enhance water literacy among councils and local communities.
- Water is central to both Indigenous culture, society and livelihoods. Stronger investment of in cultural flows will support better outcomes for communities, enhancing visitation opportunities, and delivering multiple social and economic benefits over and above enduring ecological benefits alone.

3. Monitoring and evaluating the outcomes of the use of environmental water.

Consistency, fairness, equity

In this section, we provide comment on the monitoring and evaluating of the use of environmental water itself, rather than monitoring and evaluation of the outcomes of its use.

Our members have expressed concern that current provisions governing the management, use and accountability of environmental water are not effectively measured, and that this provides an unfair advantage to environmental water users such as the Murray Darling Basin Authority and the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder as compared with other water users. We would argue that the absence of stringent monitoring and evaluation of the efficiency of environmental water use compromises the efficiency of the outcomes.

These issues can be broadly described in a number of separate issues

- a) Natural inflows – Currently there is an inconsistency between environmental water users, and other licence holders wherein naturally occurring inflows benefit the environment but are not measured and adjusted against the environmental allocation, whereas naturally occurring inflows that benefit other licence holders are accounted against their allocation.
- b) Management of storages and spillage - Our members have expressed concerns that environmental water being held in storages occupies airspace otherwise used for irrigation water, has had the effect of triggering spills. This can, and does create economic losses, and creates additional risks of unintended flooding at times of peak volume.
- c) Contribution to infrastructure access and maintenance – Currently environmental is not required to contribute to the costs associated with infrastructure access and maintenance in the same way that other licence holders are. This is seen as inequitable.
- d) Efficiency: if it can't be measured – it can't be managed – Environmental water users are not currently required to account for delivery efficiencies to the same standard as other licence holders, particularly irrigators. Our members have called for clear and regular reporting on the management and use of environmental water, with set targets, efficiency standards and transparent accountability.
- e) Unity - Close collaboration between the CEWO and the MDBA as the two primary Commonwealth agencies responsible for the attainment and delivery of environmental water. Recent comments by the retiring Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder in the [Sydney Morning Herald](#) 13 Feb 2018 suggest that more work is needed to ensure that these two agencies are able to share information and achieve required outcomes through closer collaboration.

4. Options for improving community engagement and awareness of the way in which environmental water is used and managed.

- Activities that improve community engagement and awareness of the way in which environmental water is used and managed could include:
- Development of a range of resources targeted toward local government and community stakeholders to
 - enhance water literacy
 - develop better understanding of the role of the CEWO
 - facilitate greater community involvement in and contribution to the management of Cth environmental water.
- Collaboration and investment between the CEWH, the MDBA, and the MDA in the development of regional plans by local government and community stakeholders that identify the issues and priorities of regional areas and identify key environmental activities and projects.
- Regional auspicing of community driven environmental activities in collaboration with local councils.
- Regional infrastructure – including investment in environmental tourism initiatives.
- Investment in a collaborative government/business & industry partnership initiative to drive and deliver efficiencies, such as the [South Australian River Murray Sustainability Program \(SARMS\)](#). Such activities would
 - contribute to long-term and Basin-wide environmental benefits
 - improve environmental water management
 - have strong community support
 - be undertaken collaboratively, and
 - be viable and cost-effective.
- Broad-based oversight of the work of the office, by way of a board comprising relevant stakeholders including independent experts may assist in improving community engagement and awareness of the way in which environmental water is used and managed; maximising the environmental and out benefits of environmental water; and in creating stronger interagency collaboration.

On behalf of local government across the Murray Darling Basin, we thank you for the opportunity to make this submission and look forward to providing comment at the hearings in due course.

Yours sincerely,



Emma Bradbury
Chief Executive Officer
Murray Darling Association