



Chief Executive Officer's Report

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Contents

1. Introduction	2
2. Membership	2
3. Advocacy	2
4. Partnerships, collaboration and engagement	3
5. CSIRO and the Circular Economy	4
6. Key Meetings and Engagements	4
7. 80th National Conference and AGM	5
8. Engagement Report on the benefits of membership:	6

1. Introduction

In addition to ‘business as usual’ issues, we have been focusing on key deliverables, including:

- Membership
- Executing, reporting and finalising ‘Circular Economy’ projects
- Preparing, organising and delivering MDA conference and AGM
- Working on financials
- Following up on previous motions and preparing motions for the AGM
- Ongoing advocacy

2. Membership

We are continuing to drive membership whenever and wherever possible and have conducted several membership campaigns to non members. However, membership of a council usually results from formal face to face meetings and follow up. We try to meet with non members whenever the opportunity allows. Recently, we had meetings with LGA’s in various parts of the basin and the feedback has been very positive and resulted in several councils joining, with more to come. We are planning to conduct similar visits in other regions.

3. Advocacy

We have continued to connect with related parties in the water space, both Federally and State based. Of particular note, we have developed good working partnerships with the Department of Climate Change, Environment and Water (DCCEEW) and the Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA). We have had follow up calls and had very good discussions about many subjects, including recurrent funding for the MDA as well as water buybacks. The

Minister very much enjoyed being at the MDA conference last year and meeting with the MDA Board at the last Board meeting at the end of February. She indicated that her door is open to us and looks forward to further engagement.

We received much media attention following the conference. This is continuing, so we will try to capitalise where appropriate. A number of speaking opportunities have ensued such as the Water Symposium and the Drought Resilience Hub.

The MDA was invited to attend the MDBA Leaders' Forum in Sydney in April. It was a great opportunity to meet with approximately 120 leaders from across the Basin.

We are continuing to develop relationships with State Ministers and relevant bodies and we are currently seeking further face to face meetings.

4. Partnerships, collaboration and engagement

We are continuing to work on a range of partnerships such as CSIRO, SQNNSW and One Basin CRC.

Whilst the CSIRO relationship has already provided outcomes and we are working on projects with One Basin CRC.

Feedback has been very positive in terms of the potential of these relationships.

The Murray Darling Association recently engaged with Basin Communities in Mildura, bringing together community members, education and Local Government at its Basin Water Forum on 2 May 2024 exploring the Matter of Water. Delegates engaged with peers and experts to explore Science and Bias in the Murray-Darling Basin, how it affects River Health and the sustainability of Horticulture and Agriculture through the lens of climate change, and heard about Flow and Connectivity, Water Economics, Water History, and much more!

Furthermore, the MDA Board met in person in February, and engaged with The Hon Tanya Plibersek MP, Senator Perin Davey, as well as the MDBA Executive Director River Management Andrew Reynolds.

Discussions ranged from past engagement and advocacy, and current legislation and approaches towards Basin issues and opportunities, to managing the Barmah Choke, adapting to Climate Change, and preparing for the next drought, as well as how best to minimise the impact of water purchasing.

A detailed communique of the engagements can be found on www.mda.asn.au.

5. CSIRO and the Circular Economy

CSIRO Land and Water has partnered with MDA to investigate and explore a series of strategic growth areas that align with the biggest land and water challenges faced by Australian governments/agencies, industries, and communities. These growth areas will build on capabilities and that of our partners and transform the boundaries of the types of products, research projects and services we might collaborate on.

The CSIRO have identified Repurposing Waste / Circular Economy as a strategic growth area and are interested in validating this with LGA's as a valued partner. The CSIRO would like to understand more about how LGA's work within the repurposing waste / circular economy area within their organisation. They are also keen to hear about any future aspirations they might have in regard to infrastructure solutions they need now and into the future.

“The MDA had achieved in 3 months what would have taken CSIRO years.”

To capture these insights, the MDA has completed a series of meetings that will build towards, and help inform the future of this growth area and ensure the CSIRO can design solutions that are of value for all. We have now successfully completed all requirements of the initial engagement with Local Government Areas and presented our findings to the management of CSIRO.

We have engaged with CSIRO on a further project, which is an extension of the previous Circular Economy work. There is the potential to conduct further work with CSIRO departments which we are continuing to explore. A meeting is planned with CSIRO and Shepparton Council in November 2024, which is designed to further understanding Circular Economy opportunities in local government.

In addition to the above projects, we are providing consultancy to an organisation that is working in the Circular Economy.

6. Key Meetings and Engagements

Date	Event/meeting	Location
1/3/2024	DCCEEW: Workshop Draft Framework for delivering the 450GL	Held Virtually
4/3/2024	Meeting with InPipe Energy	Held Virtually
7/3/2024	Meeting with the CSIRO	Held Virtually
7/3/2024	Meeting with Argyle Capital	Held Virtually
12/3/2024	Outback Radio: Radio Interview	Telephone
13/3/2024	Meeting with Argyle Capital	Held Virtually
19/3/2024	One Basin CRC: Introductory meeting to 1BCRC Education & Training industry steering group	Held Virtually
20/3/2024	DPE: Water Engagement Roundup – How Environmental Water is managed in NSW	Held Virtually
26/3/2024	One Basin CRC: Co-design Community of Practice	Held Virtually
3/4/2024	Meeting with the CSIRO	Held Virtually
18/4/2024	One Basin CRC Partner Briefing Update	Held Virtually

7. 80th National Conference and AGM

In addition to the National Conference, we are also planning other events such as the Water Forum in Mildura on 2nd May, titled, “The Matter of Water.”

The feedback from our previous National conference has been very positive. We were able to secure the key speakers we wanted as well as relevant sponsors. The number of delegates was in excess of 150. Sponsorships were particularly pleasing and we secured 2 platinum sponsors as well as a dinner sponsor. Overall, we were very pleased with the result. In addition, we made a positive contribution to our financial position.

This year, we already have secured some key sponsors, including CSIRO. Timing is a challenge this year as it is effectively 3 months ahead of previous years. This is due to local government elections in NSW and Victoria.

Looking forward, I am pleased to officially launch the webpage and invite you to the ***Murray Darling Association's 80th National Conference and AGM*** to be held ***8th~11th July, 2024*** in ***Tamworth, NSW***, exploring “The future of Water Security”.

This exciting event will bring together leaders and decision makers from across the Murray-Darling Basin, and will be a wonderful opportunity to meet again, face to face.

Tamworth is a thriving regional city and is the heart of the New England region. It's a destination for family fun, outdoor adventure, foodie delights, the arts and heritage, plus so much more!

Renowned for its laid-back lifestyle, incredible landscapes and generous hospitality, Tamworth is where rich heritage meets outdoor adventure, arts and culture complement luxury, and sports intersect action and fun!

The MDA's 80th National Conference & AGM is ***your opportunity*** to be part of the solution – to join the conversation, to inform future policy, and to engage with the innovators, scientists, educators, and leaders of our time.

The MDA encourages all member, and non-member councils to consider your attendance, to join the conversation, to inform future policy, and to engage with the innovators, scientists, educators, and leaders of our time and be a part of the solution to the management of Basin resources!

Join us in Tamworth, where local, technical, and political leaders will come together to tackle the big issues of the Basin and forge a future for councils, catchments, and communities.

8. Engagement Report on the benefits of membership:

The MDA has been embarking on a membership drive, in order to try to secure new members as well as retain our current membership.

A keen focus has been identified in the Northern Basin, where we want to ensure that the Northern Basin is engaged to its fullest potential. We are pleased to note that our engagement with Councils and entities across the Basin bearing fruit! We are delighted to welcome Murray River Council, and Inverell Shire Council, and note an uptake of individual membership.

With over 167 councils in the MDB, the ongoing partnership between Councils and the Murray Darling Association elevates local and regional issues and priorities to the state and federal level providing national recognition of local priorities.

Membership to the MDA delivers social, economic, and environmental benefits to each community by creating partnerships, participating in events, and accessing networks and services that align with and support all Community plans, in the areas of Community, Environment, Economy and Council.

We know that councils and the local government sector are increasingly resource challenged and are looking for services, relationships and partnerships that assist in achieving your council's and your region's strategic priorities.

Water, land management, energy and community wellbeing are front and centre of almost every council's priorities. A strong relationship between council and the MDA provides opportunities to

- partner with councils and regional groups in providing local case studies and experience to support regional and national positions and advocacy strategies.
- raise the profile of your council and the local government sector through MDA's partnerships with the Commonwealth.
- present strategically aligned priorities, objectives, and advocacy to state and federal governments.
- leverage regional efficiencies and Basin-scale capability and positions.

Benefits to your community.

The MDA fosters a culture of community collaboration and leadership development to improve social, cultural, environmental, and economic well-being across the Murray-Darling Basin.

Working together with member councils and our regions, we achieve policy change and ensure local knowledge informs the national dialogue on water reform, land management, environmental sustainability, leadership development and education, and regional economic diversification.

Council's participation at MDA region and national meetings builds regional relationships and elevates the community's priorities to the state and federal level, informing decisions and outcomes that impact your local area.

Benefits to your environment.

There is no future on a dry riverbed. At the core of our vision is a strong emphasis on science and education to inform policies for the sustainable management of Basin resources to ensure a healthy and prosperous future.

The MDA's vision, which drives our strategic and operational direction, is for *local government and communities to work together to achieve a healthy, vibrant and thriving Murray-Darling Basin*. As a result, the MDA has:

- Partnered with CSIRO with a focus on science and education to address some of the Basin's toughest challenges.
- Advocated for and represented local government in environmental issues, including floodplain harvesting etc.
- Partnered with Murray-Darling Basin Authority, better supporting local government through information sharing and representation.
- Supported regions to develop Climate Ready Communities statements

Benefits to your economy.

For many, if not all, Basin communities, water security plays an important role in economic growth and sustainability. Through the MDA's regional alignments and partnerships, member councils leverage the value of knowledge sharing across the local government and regional development sectors to peruse water quality, water security and other priorities.

The MDA provides member councils with partnerships that support regional economic development and diversification initiatives.

Benefits to your council.

Our mission is to provide high value services to our members, and their communities by delivering quality projects, events and products create enduring value for Basin communities and governments.

Our achievements

The Murray Darling Association has been successful in shifting policies to better reflect the needs of the Basin communities, and we are continuing to grow our reach and impact as portrayed in our [Vision 2025 Strategic Plan](#).

The relationship between the MDA and our member Councils contributes strongly to the development of the local government sector as a whole and our collective role in ensuring a vibrant, sustainable future for the Murray-Darling Basin.

Mark D. Lamb

Chief Executive Officer