COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE REPORT
2004–2005

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CAC members visiting ‘Trawalla’, a pecan farm, near Moree in October 2004

(Photo: Sue Vize)
The Hon. Peter McGauran MP
Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Minister

We would like to submit the Community Advisory Committee's annual report for 2004–05, to be tabled together with the Murray-Darling Basin Commission's annual report, in the parliaments of Australia, New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and Victoria, and the Legislative Assembly of the Australian Capital Territory.

This report marks the first year of operation of the fourth Community Advisory Committee. This was a year of significant change and development for the Committee and its new members. The Committee was able to make a significant contribution in relation to The Living Murray and fostering the beginnings of a Darling Initiative to provide for river health in the northern parts of the Basin. We feel strongly that a whole of Basin approach is important to the future of the Murray-Darling Basin Initiative.

We commend the 2004–05 Annual Report of the Community Advisory Committee to the five parliaments and the ACT Legislative Assembly.

Yours sincerely

Leith Boully
Chairman
(1 June 2004 to 11 April 2005)

Myles Treseder
Acting Chairman
(12 April to 30 June 2005)
The Fourth Community Advisory Committee (CAC) was appointed in May 2004. The first part of 2004–05 was a time of building familiarity with the Murray-Darling Basin and the Initiative and developing teamwork within the Committee.

The CAC met formally seven times in both the northern and southern Basin. Meetings have involved interaction with local communities to garner information on issues pertinent to the local area, foster relationships and build networks within those communities.

The term of the CAC Chairman, Ms Leith Boully expired on 11 April 2005. With the selection process for a new Chairman still to be finalised, Deputy Chairman and Irrigation representative, Myles Treseder was appointed as Acting Chairman. As at 30 June 2005, Myles Treseder continues in that role.

The CAC Chairman attended Ministerial Council meetings in November 2004 and April 2005, as well as all Commission meetings until the expiry of her term. The Acting CAC Chairman attended the Commission meeting held in June 2005. The CAC provided advice on a range of issues throughout the year, in particular relating to The Living Murray, establishment of a Darling initiative and Indigenous involvement in natural resource management.

The CAC developed its first Business Plan which was endorsed by Ministerial Council on 26 November 2004. The Murray-Darling Basin Agreement 1992, the CAC’s Terms of Reference and the Integrated Catchment Management Policy (2001) provide the context for the CAC’s work priorities for this year. The key objectives in the Business Plan are:

1. Provide strategic advice on natural resource management issues of significance reflecting the range of community views across the Basin to Council.
2. Disseminate Council’s decisions to the wider community.
4. Participate in community engagement and policy development in a strategic and timely manner as directed by Ministerial Council.
Strategic Advice on Natural Resource Management Issues

The Living Murray

The Living Murray continues to be a primary focus of CAC policy advice to Council, particularly relating to the community engagement process surrounding the implementation of The Living Murray Business Plan. Key areas for the CAC’s advice in 2004–05 were:

- informing the wider community on The Living Murray Business Plan and its implementation
- ensuring that the management of unregulated flow (non-Cap water or surplus flows) does not undermine the outcomes of The Living Murray
- the key role of improved knowledge on the ecology and condition of the Murray to underpin implementation and further decision-making, and build community confidence in the science supporting The Living Murray
• improving community input to the development of environmental watering plans and asset management plans
• ensuring that Indigenous people and their knowledge is incorporated into environmental watering plans and asset management plans.

The CAC has been concerned at the lack of information and community engagement in the implementation of The Living Murray over the first year. The CAC continues to have input into the development of The Living Murray Communication Strategy through involvement in focus groups. The Strategy is expected to be finalised for implementation in late 2005.

In addition, the CAC has a role in providing advice on the development of The Living Murray Environmental Watering Plan and the River Murray Channel Asset Environmental Management Plan. There were only limited opportunities to have input to this process in 2004–05.

Darling Initiative

Following discussions with communities in the northern Basin, the CAC provided advice to Ministerial Council that communities in the Darling Basin had indicated their desire to establish “a community-led initiative to guide the integrated management of the rivers of the Darling Basin.” A working group from the region was formed to further the development of a proposal for the initiative, to report back to the Darling community in August 2005.

Indigenous Action Plan

The CAC continued to provide advice on the development of the Murray-Darling Basin Indigenous Action Plan and engagement of Indigenous people in natural resource management in general. The CAC has provided input to the development of the Plan through the Project Board and through CAC meetings.

Specific advice has also been provided to Council on the need to finalise the Memorandum of Understanding with Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations and to develop a similar relationship with the Northern Rivers Indigenous Nations.
Work is currently underway to develop protocols for the conduct of CAC activities in a manner respectful of Indigenous people. These protocols are being developed with the input of Indigenous people in the Basin facilitated through the CAC’s Indigenous members.

**Basin Salinity Management**

The CAC received the outcomes of two independent reviews of the Basin Salinity Management Plan. Members were very supportive of the progress made to date. The CAC supported the recommendations made by the Independent Audit Group, with priority given to:

- research and investigations into mechanisms leading to salt accessions during flood recessions
- further information from partner governments for provisional entries to be made to complete the salinity registers and allow more thorough evaluation
- tracking of temporary water trades with a view to assessing salinity impacts

**Cap on Diversions**

The CAC noted that it is now 10 years since the introduction of the Cap on Diversions and that although adherence to the Cap is assessed on an annual basis, there has been no review of the Cap mechanisms since 2000. The CAC advised Ministerial Council that the 10 year mark would be an appropriate time to review the effectiveness of the Cap, incorporating a review of groundwater use.

**Interstate Water Trade**

The CAC was briefed on the progress with establishing permanent interstate water trade in the southern-connected Basin. CAC members advised Ministerial Council of the need for clear rules to be agreed, including consideration of environmental impacts, before the market is opened, and to ensure there are opportunities for community input prior to decisions being taken on further reforms to interstate water trade.
Disseminating Council’s decisions

A Community Forum co-hosted by the CAC and the Commission, saw more than 130 people representing a wide range of interests across the Basin gather in Mildura on 4 June 2005. Ministers, partner government representatives and Commission staff explained how the The Living Murray Business Plan will guide the implementation of the First Step Decision for The Living Murray and outlined processes for the water recovery, management, accounting and delivery to the six Living Murray significant ecological assets.

A series of smaller local forums at each of The Living Murray Significant Ecological Assets commenced with a meeting in Renmark on 24 June.

The CAC continues to provide information on Council’s decisions through distributing communiqués and attending local and regional community meetings.

Community Engagement

CAC meetings were held in a number of locations across the Basin including Echuca, Wentworth and Moree. These meetings provided CAC members with an opportunity to meet with representatives from local organisations and visit sites including Barmah-Millewa forest, Menindee Lakes, Tandou and Cubbie Station. The CAC invites local people involved in natural resource management to meet with CAC members at these regional meetings.

Seven members of the CAC visited northern NSW in October 2004 to meet with local community representatives and discuss natural resource management issues in this part of the Basin. The key issues raised during this tour informed the CAC’s advice to Council and provided the ground work for two forums on the development of a natural resource management initiative for the improved management of the rivers in the Darling Basin.

In December 2004, the CAC convened a representative group of people from throughout the Darling Basin to consider the future natural resource management of the Darling Basin. The meeting requested the CAC coordinate a larger community forum to consider the issues more fully.
On 25 February 2005, more than 130 members of the Darling Basin community met in Moree to discuss a common goal of developing a Darling Basin initiative. The meeting overwhelmingly supported the establishment of a community-led initiative to guide the integrated management of the rivers of the Darling Basin and elected a working group, independent of the CAC, to develop a process and structure to take the initiative forward. The group will report progress to the Darling Basin community in August 2005.

The CAC established The Living Murray Community Reference Group (CRG) in April 2005. This Committee held its first meeting in May 2005. The key roles for this group are to provide advice on the development of the River Murray Channel Asset Management Plan and the overarching Environmental Watering Plan for all of the Significant Ecological Assets. Wide community input through strong linkages between the CRG, the CAC and The Living Murray initiative continues to inform decision making on The Living Murray initiative.

Through the Secretariat, the CAC continues to support the Murray-Darling Basin Leadership graduate network. In March 2005 the first meeting of the network was held in Canberra with 11 graduates from courses one and two. The meeting produced a plan of action for the coming year and provided advice to Minister Truss and the President on this proposal, which includes utilising the network to provide advice to the Commission and CAC.

**Policy Development**

CAC members continued to be active in MDBC committees throughout the year, participating on:

- ICM Policy Committee, Finance Committee and Water Policy Committee (did not meet in 2004-05)
A number of committees were inactive during the year, including the Program Knowledge Committees. It is expected that the committee restructuring following the completion of the Commission’s Strategic Plan will ensure an active CAC participation in all areas of policy development in the future.

The CAC's main activity in providing policy advice is through its reports to Ministerial Council.

**The Integrated Catchment Management approach**

Integrated Catchment Management in the Murray-Darling Basin 2001-2010 (ICM Policy) was launched in 2001 and established a long-term partnership between the CAC and the Ministerial Council. The CAC supports the ICM approach as the basis for all natural resource management activities across the Basin and has adopted the values and principles in the ICM Policy to guide the way it operates.

The CAC was instrumental in the development of a set of draft performance measures adopted in principle by Council in May 2003. The performance measures are designed to determine whether or not processes to implement the ICM approach have been set up and how effectively they have worked. The performance measures cover seven key areas: knowledge, governance, institutional arrangements, investment, engagement, capacity building and target setting.

Focus groups and surveys conducted late 2003–early 2004 by Colmar Brunton Social Research, have provided baseline data on the key performance measures relating to community perceptions on key aspects of implementing the ICM approach including knowledge, engagement and governance. Results in these three key areas informed a joint discussion with Ministerial Council held 1 April 2005.

A publication summarising the key findings will be published early in the 2005–06 financial year.
Performance Report

The CAC Business Plan includes a number of performance indicators. Analysis of progress in implementing the Business Plan is tracked against these indicators. Effectiveness of CAC advice is monitored through a decision tracking register. Other milestones can be monitored through the delivery of reports or outputs specified. In March-April 2005, the Secretariat conducted a survey “CAC Member Survey of Services Provided by the Secretariat” (the 2005 Survey). The purpose was to gauge the effectiveness of the Secretariat in meeting the members’ needs and to provide baseline information for future surveys. Twelve members responded, equating to a 60 per cent return rate.

Strategic Advice to Council

The CAC provided advice to Council for the November 2004 and April 2005 meetings through formal agenda papers to both meetings covering: implementation of The Living Murray Business Plan, the need to review the Basin Cap on diversions, priority issues for the Basin Salinity Management Strategy, strategic planning priorities, implementation of permanent Interstate Water Trading rules, a community-led Darling Basin initiative, Indigenous Engagement and Floodplain Management.

Discussions at the joint Council/CAC meeting held 1 April 2005 have been reported under Integrated Catchment Management above.

Key outcomes:
Recommendations to Council:
62% of the CAC’s recommendations were adopted
29% of the CAC’s recommendations were noted but not adopted
9% of the CAC’s recommendations were neither adopted nor noted

Disseminate Council Decisions

The 2005 Survey showed that all responders are actively engaged in networking across the range of interests in communities.
CAC members use the formal Communiqué, issued following each Council meeting, as the basis to inform the community of Council’s decisions. Following each Commission and CAC meeting, the Secretariat also provides CAC members with a Communiqué to assist in discussions with community networks.

Key outcomes:
Two communiqués circulated.

One regional and one local forum to inform the community of Council’s Living Murray initiative.

Advice on Community Engagement

The CAC continues to provide formal advice to Ministerial Council on engagement activities for The Living Murray. The establishment of the CRG will strengthen this advice in the future. Two members participated in a working group on the development of The Living Murray Communication Strategy.

Key outcomes:
Advice to Council in November and April on TLM engagement, the Darling Initiative and the Indigenous Action Plan

Establishment of TLM Community Reference Group

Formation of a CAC Working Group to develop a Murray-Darling Basin Engagement Policy

Policy Development

The CAC provided advice on a range of existing policies currently under implementation and participated in the development of policies on:
- Indigenous engagement
- Interstate Water Trade
- Murray-Darling Basin Commission Strategic Plan

Key outcomes:
Eleven members attended 30 high-level committee, project board and implementation working group meetings of the Commission (note that some committees did not meet in 2004–05); 26 per cent submitted reports
Effectiveness of the ICM Approach

In 2004–05 the CAC reviewed the output of the first survey on perceptions of effectiveness of the ICM approach. Advice was provided to Ministerial Council and a publication summarising the outcomes of the survey was prepared.

The CAC has proposed that future monitoring of the effectiveness of the ICM approach be incorporated into a State of the Basin reporting format drawing together all activities of the Murray-Darling Basin Initiative.

Key outcomes:
Perceptions on Implementing Integrated Catchment Management in the Murray-Darling Basin prepared

Communication and Capacity Building

Under the CAC Business Plan, building effective networks within the Murray-Darling Basin Initiative and in the wider community is seen as a high priority. CAC members have approached Ministers and Commissioners to establish direct communication and briefings prior to meetings.

Capacity building for CAC members was largely undertaken through developing a better knowledge of the Basin and the programs within the Murray-Darling Basin Initiative. CAC members have now visited all states/territories within the Basin and been briefed on all on-going projects and key policies of the Initiative and commenced briefings on policies currently under development.

Key outcomes:
New South Wales has arrangements for regular meetings between members and Commissioners/Ministers. South Australia and Queensland have a protocol for formal meetings between members and Commissioners/Ministers.
Secretariat support

The CAC is supported by a secretariat to provide effective support to the Chairman and members and active furtherance of the CAC’s Business Plan.

Key findings of a recent survey of CAC members relating to the standard of services provided by the Secretariat were:

Professionalism of the Secretariat: 83 per cent rated “All” and 17 per cent rated “Most” of the staff as helpful, knowledgeable and professional, with no adverse comments made on the service provided by the Secretariat.

Logistics: 84 per cent were happy with travel arrangements and the standard of accommodation provided, while 91 per cent believed meeting papers and other paperwork was processed within acceptable timeframes.