

## **Murray–Darling Basin Authority**

### **Meeting 108 – 4 April 2017**

#### **Minutes**

**Members in Attendance:** The Hon Neil Andrew (Chair); Ms Dianne Davidson; Mr George Warne; Professor Barry Hart; Ms Susan Madden; and the MDBA Chief Executive, Mr Phillip Glyde.

Supported by relevant agency staff.

#### **Agenda item 1: Opening of meeting, disclosure of interests and apologies**

1. The Chair, Mr Andrew, opened the meeting at 8:55 am and welcomed members and MDBA staff. There were no apologies.

##### *Conflict of Interest*

2. Professor Hart declared that Alluvium had a contract for work in Nimmie–Caira, but noted he was not involved in that work. Mr Warne reported that RMCG was undertaking work on socio-economic impacts in the southern Murray, but that he was not involved. He also reported that he had met with the operations manager of Snowy Hydro about a different matter the week before the Snowy Hydro announcement was made by the Prime Minister.
3. Ms Madden advised that she had been appointed chair of Central West Local Land Service; she was previously a board member.
4. The Authority **noted** the opening remarks of the Chair.

#### **Agenda item 2: Adoption of draft agenda**

5. The Authority **adopted** the draft agenda.

#### **Agenda item 3: Confirmation of minutes of meeting 107**

6. The Authority **confirmed** the minutes from meeting 107 held on 7 March 2017.

#### **Agenda item 4: Chair's report**

7. The Chair commented on how adaptable the Basin Plan was proving to be. He reported on the successful roundtable meeting of peak groups, held in association with the Ministerial Council meeting in Mildura in March. He noted that, while there were opposing views, there was recognition of the validity of the different views and that both the roundtable and reception allowed for great interaction and demonstrated the flexibility of the Basin Plan.
8. Mr Andrew reported that he had attended a local government conference in Karoonda in the South Australian lower Mallee, followed by a range of meetings and tours in South Australia, including Goolwa, Meningie, Murray Bridge and a visit to the barrages.
9. Members discussed the continued extent of acidification in the Murray Bridge region, noting that it had not dissipated as fast as had been expected.
10. Members discussed the previous request from the Murray Darling Association (MDA) for project funding for the 2017 Evaluation. MDBA officials were working with the MDA and were developing a proposal to utilise the established MDA networks and groupings to facilitate improved engagement with local government.

11. The Authority **noted** the Chair's report.

#### **Agenda item 5: Basin Community Committee Chair's report**

12. Mr Rory Treweeke, Chair of the Basin Community Committee (BCC), reported on the activities and observations of BCC members. He noted that BCC members had participated in the MDBA's Broken Hill and Pooncarie meetings and tours, as well as the stakeholder events held around the Mildura Ministerial Council meeting. BCC members observed that although conditions looked good around the Lower Lakes and Coorong, there had not been a comparable return to the production levels of the past.

13. Mr Treweeke reported that he had met the board of the Goulburn–Broken Catchment Management Authority in Euroa, noting that concerns about socio-economic impacts persisted. Concerns about the level of understanding of the connected lower Basin and the different water entitlement types also remained. He commented that he had reassured interlocutors that anything done by the MDBA in relation to socio-economic assessment would be done with absolute integrity.

14. He reported that there was some welcome rainfall in the northern Basin on the back of Cyclone Debbie.

15. The Authority **noted** the report from the BCC Chair and members.

#### **Agenda item 6: Authority members' updates**

16. Authority members provided updates on the meetings they had been involved in.

17. Professor Hart reported that he had been involved in community consultations on Northern Territory shale gas, and discussed the different approaches taken and the implications for the MDBA's engagement strategies.

18. Ms Madden reported that New South Wales had released new information papers on water sharing and its floodplain harvesting monitoring plan.

19. The Authority **noted** the updates from the Authority members.

#### **Agenda item 7: Chief Executive's report**

20. Mr Glyde noted that the next steps in relation to regional offices had been announced, with positive feedback from a number of local members. An op-ed had been issued emphasising that operational rather than regional development issues were the driver for the decision to establish regional offices.

21. He also noted that improvements in cross water agency/jurisdictional engagement with stakeholders were evident in a series of meetings at Pooncarie and Broken Hill.

22. He noted that the South Australia Murray–Darling Basin Natural Resources Management Board had advertised for a replacement regional engagement officer and had emphasised the Board was keen to continue with the program.

23. It was reported that there could be a need to alert recreational users of the River Murray around Easter to low flow rates downstream of the Hume Dam if irrigation demand was reduced due to rainfall.

24. The Authority **noted** the Chief Executive's report.

### **Agenda item 8: Basin Plan amendment update**

25. Mr Brent Williams, General Manager Basin Plan Amendments, reported that the analysis of submissions had been completed. There were a wide range of views expressed in the submissions, broadly reflecting the wide range of sectoral interests. Mr Williams noted that the toolkit measures were widely supported through the submissions, but views on whether governments would adopt the toolkit measures differed.
26. Members reaffirmed the importance of the toolkit measures and emphasised the need for consistency in approach as the measures were negotiated.
27. The Authority **noted**:
  - (a) the updated analysis of issues raised in submissions on the proposed Basin Plan amendment
  - (b) progress in the development of the northern Basin toolkit
  - (c) the status of proposed changes to the Basin Plan amendment
  - (d) the next steps in the amendment process.

### **Agenda item 9: Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists**

28. The Chair welcomed representatives from the Wentworth Group. Mr Peter Cosier reflected on the development of the Basin Plan and the Wentworth Group's engagement with and reaction to the Plan. He noted that the Group had initiated its own review of progress to date with the Plan.
29. The Wentworth Group representatives emphasised that they considered the biggest issue was that the broader community was not part of the process. The Group has commissioned a series of studies, including socio-economic analysis, to inform a review of the sustainable diversion limit (SDL) process and an analysis of future requirements based on climate change.
30. The Authority **noted** the presentation by Professor Bruce Thom, Dr Celine Steinfeld and Mr Cosier.

### **Agenda item 10: Sustainable diversion limit adjustment update**

31. Dr Peta Derham, General Manager Eco-hydrology Analysis, outlined progress associated with the SDL adjustment mechanism following the recent Ministerial Council and Basin Officials Committee meetings.
32. Mr Carl Binning, Executive Director Environmental Management, indicated that a detailed briefing would be provided at the May meeting.
33. The Authority **noted** the update on the sustainable diversion limit adjustment mechanism.

### **Agenda item 11: Related party disclosure**

34. Authority members were advised that a new national accounting standard would need to be applied to the MDBA as the previous exemption of government entities was being revoked. The changes would apply to the 2016–17 financial year and disclosures would need to be made by all Authority members.
35. The Authority **noted** the presentation and future actions required.

### **Agenda item 12: Environmental Watering Outlook 2016–17**

36. Authority members received statistics indicating that the electronic provision of RipRap (a magazine prepared by the Australian River Restoration Centre) had been very successful in getting the message out about environmental watering, noting that it was primarily to those who wanted to hear the message, but that it was also a great education resource.
37. Members indicated support for the use of more web-based distribution and noted the development of broader engagement strategies.
38. The Authority **noted**:
  - (a) the 'Basin environmental outlook for 2017–18' (the Outlook)
  - (b) that there is an important opportunity to follow-up the big flows in 2016 with environmental watering that consolidates the benefits of the 2016 flows and builds the resilience of ecosystems ahead of the next, inevitable dry period
  - (c) that rolling, multi-year environmental watering priorities are in preparation and that the move to publish rolling priorities that address multiple years has strong support from environmental water holders and managers
  - (d) the intention to put additional effort into consulting on and communicating rolling multi-year priorities.

### **Agenda item 13: Other business**

39. There was no other business.

### **Agenda item 14: Next meeting**

40. The Authority **agreed** that its next meeting would be held in Albury–Wodonga on 2 May 2017.
41. The meeting closed at 4:05 pm.