

BACKGROUND

Leeton is the home of the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area (MIA). The MIA is a purpose built irrigation area that is over 100 years old. It was built along with Burrinjuck Dam to drought proof the nation and ensure food security for Australia. Today the MIA covers an area of nearly 380,000ha, 141,000ha of which was irrigated in 2017 through an intricate network of canals, channels and drains that support a diverse array of crops, both permanent and annual. Aided by world class research and development, together with world class farming practices, farm production levels in the MIA are impressive. The MIA is indeed the premier food bowl in NSW and in the Murray Darling Basin. The area also supports an impressive mix of food and fibre manufacturing, generating prolific export earnings for the nation and sustaining the workforce and communities required to keep the region thriving.

LEETON SHIRE COUNCIL'S 10-POINT POSITION STATEMENT:

1. Council aspires to achieve a Murray Darling Basin River System that is healthy and can sustainably support a prosperous irrigated agricultural sector and its communities. Council recognises that Climate Change makes the task more challenging. Council welcomes further government support to deliver water and farm more efficiently so that the environment can recover and the MIA can continue to thrive into the future.
2. Council aspires to sustain and responsibly grow the MIA's agricultural production through optimised and sustainable use of all irrigable lands, the considered and careful application of water and ongoing research and development. Council aspires to MIA-held water entitlements remaining in the MIA - especially during dry or drought years - to efficiently service a diverse agricultural sector that has an appropriate balance of permanent and annual crops. Council calls for strong leadership from governments, and advocates for a moratorium on the opening up of new farming areas on greenfield sites where the delivery or use of water is less efficient than existing farming areas in the Basin.
3. Council considers that any local, regional or nation Plans, including the Murray Darling Basin Plan, need regular review, including sensible adjustment of delivery timeframes as new information, new science, new opportunities and new risks come to light. Council considers that more time is needed to ensure the more complex Sustainable Diversion Adjustment Mechanism projects are fully and appropriately planned, assessed and implemented so that the outcomes will genuinely benefit the environment and support local communities to thrive.
4. Council only supports interventions that achieve a healthy Basin without impacting the socio-economic wellbeing of communities. Wellbeing and economic success must be considered at a whole of community level, not only at the farm gate. Genuine collaboration and consultation is required between stakeholders to ensure win-win outcomes are achieved.
5. Council does not support any further buybacks of productive water and believes any further recovery needs to be associated with infrastructure projects that drive efficiency and water conservation. The cap on buybacks must be maintained and the 450ML 'upwater' target must never be pursued outside of the 'neutrality test'.

6. Council calls for a more strategic, integrated and transparent approach to water management by the federal and state governments, as well as local irrigation companies. This includes:
 - Honouring the principles of the National Water Initiative 2004 and Water Act 2007, and specifically
 - Addressing the erosion of General Security water entitlements
 - Making provisions to ensure Carryover is being used appropriately and does not compromise water entitlements
 - Reinstating certainty and reliability of water access for users, particularly those located in purpose-built irrigation areas
 - Improving understanding of how groundwater interfaces with rivers and its future management
 - Improving understanding and accountability of conveyance and other losses
 - Implementing more integrated management of Basin water resources.
7. Council calls for federal and state funded resources to be directed to coordinating and implementing the findings of all water related enquiries since the Plan was commissioned, especially the findings of the Productivity Commission 2018 and the upcoming findings of the ACCC. Council considers that water trading policy as it stands is often at odds with the Murray Darling Basin Plan, sometimes compromising river health and failing to ensure the most efficient use of available productive water.
8. Council believes that diversity of crop type is the region's strength. Council calls for federal and state governments to resource the development of a fully integrated Agricultural Strategy, having regard to associated land use planning and the Basin Plan's goal of ensuring water is used as efficiently as possible. In the interim, Council also calls for a moratorium on agricultural developments involving permanent plantings south of the Barmah Choke that require irrigation.
9. Council supports increased coordination and transparency of all policies and decisions related to water, including full and easily accessible visibility of all water trades and all allocation decisions.
10. Council calls for the effectiveness of environmental watering projects and the outcomes of efficiency projects (both on and off farm) to be closely monitored and fully reported, and adjustments made where required to ensure project aims are being appropriately delivered and/or realised.



Mayor Paul Maytom
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