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MEDIA RELEASE

Alexandrina Council welcomes independent review findings into Lower Lakes

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Alexandrina Council is pleased by the findings of an independent review released last week assessing the science of the Coorong, Lower Lakes and Murray Mouth.

The review was commissioned by the Murray Darling Basin Authority in late 2019 in response to questioning by some stakeholders as to whether or not the Lower Lakes were fresh prior to construction of the barrages, and the suggestion that removal of the barrages might result in an increase in water for upstream use.

A panel of five independent experts, chaired by Francis Chiew – Senior Principal Research Scientist from the CSIRO – was established to:

- review the existing science relating to the management of the Lower Lakes and Coorong,
- identify advantages and/or implications of called-for changes, and
- note the knowledge gaps to fill to accurately plan for future climate change.

In delivering their findings last week, the panel found that the science of the Lower Lakes, Coorong and Murray Mouth is well understood and the Lower Lakes are being managed appropriately in a way that's consistent with the research findings.

Key findings from the review include:

- the Lower Lakes were largely fresh prior to European settlement;
- removing the barrages would have significant ecological and socio-economic impacts;
- removing the barrages would not result in any water savings; and
- under climate change, the management of the Coorong, Lower Lakes and Murray Mouth will become increasingly challenging.

Alexandrina Council Mayor Keith Parkes said the findings will offer relief to the community and enable forward planning.

“We are pleased with the findings of the independent review, which reaffirm what Alexandrina Council and our community have been saying for many years – healthy rivers flow to the sea. All Basin States must work together to secure a healthy river system all the way from Queensland through to the Murray Mouth”.

Mayor Parkes suggested the findings will come as a relief to the local community who have been fighting to secure a healthy, freshwater future for the Lower Lakes for many years.

“We agree with MDBA Chief Executive Phillip Glyde – the time has come to leave behind any debate on the freshwater history of the Lower Lakes or the removal of the barrages, and instead refocus our efforts on adapting to the challenges of climate change” he said.

The independent review identified key knowledge gaps that need to be filled to plan for the future management of the region in a changing climate. Alexandrina Council declared a ‘Climate Emergency’ at their December 2019 Council Meeting, providing a clear mandate to place climate change at the forefront of local action.

“We acknowledge the challenge ahead of reduced inflows and rising sea levels and support the call to develop a comprehensive climate adaptation pathway for the Lakes and Coorong region” said Mayor Parkes, “but right now we need to stick with the Basin Plan and maintain our focus on continuing to recover environmental flows”.

Murray Darling Association Region 6 Chair and Alexandrina Councillor Melissa Rebbeck also welcomed the findings, and spoke to the inevitable agricultural management challenges associated with a changing climate.

“The Independent Panel findings reaffirm that agricultural communities throughout the whole Basin, including ours, will need ongoing assistance to adapt to a future with less water. State and Federal Governments must continue to work together to foster opportunities and incentives that support agriculture to both adapt to and mitigate climate change, and in addition, continue to invest in research, development and extension in this space. Growth in agricultural productivity can occur but not at the expense of a healthy river,” she said.