

2023/24

ANNUAL REPORT

MURRAYLANDS & RIVERLAND LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION



Murraylands and Riverland Local Government Association



Constituent Councils



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MRLGA OVERVIEW

Mission

Being a unified local government sector working in the best interest of the region and our communities.

Our Charter

- Speaking with one voice
- Building partnerships
- Working with the LGA
- Planning for and with the region
- Coordinating resources and representation
- Enhancing efficiencies

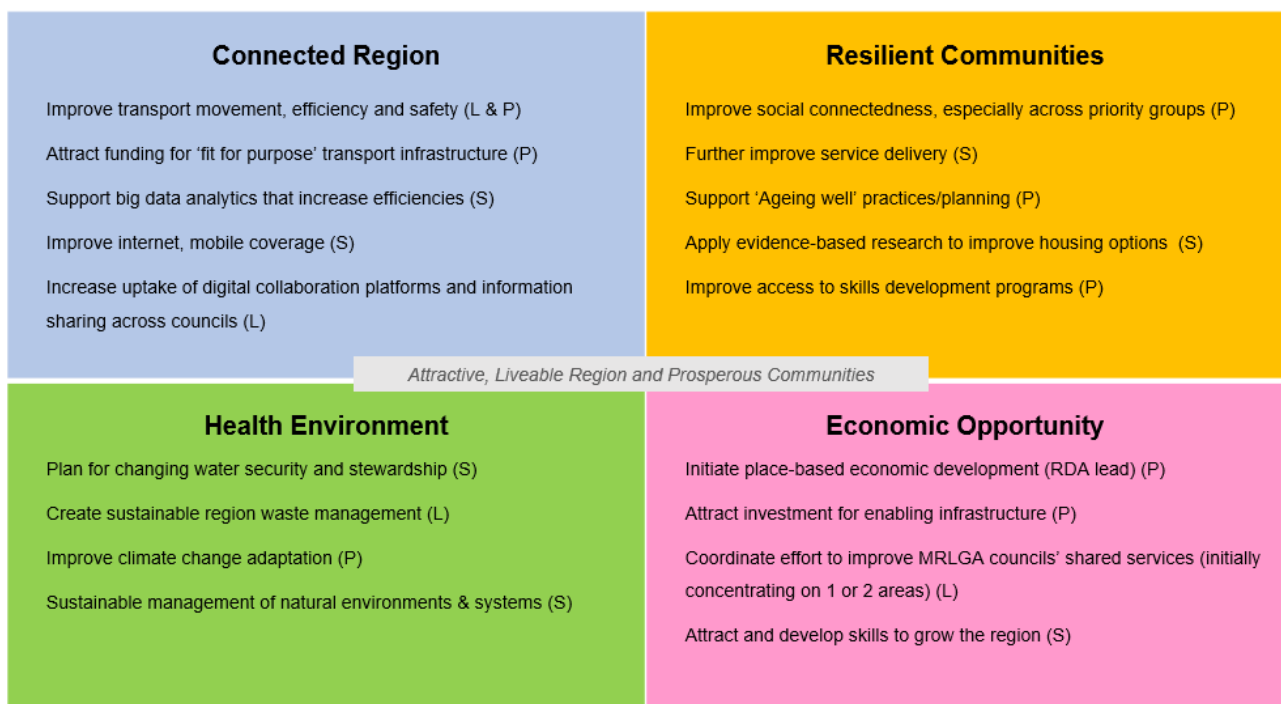
Values and Behaviours

Integrity, Leadership, Collaboration, Credibility, Unity

Role

Working to the MRLGA Charter, the Association motivates, advocates and represents its eight constituent Councils to advance cooperation, strategic partnerships and governance arrangements that oversee programs and projects in the region. Through its coordination of effort, the Association leads and assists its councils with evidence-based approaches to high level planning, communication and representation. The MRLGA works closely with Local Government Association SA, Commonwealth and State Governments, as well as regional partners including Regional Development Australia Murraylands and Riverland (RDA MR) and Murraylands & Riverland Landscape Board.

Strategic Framework

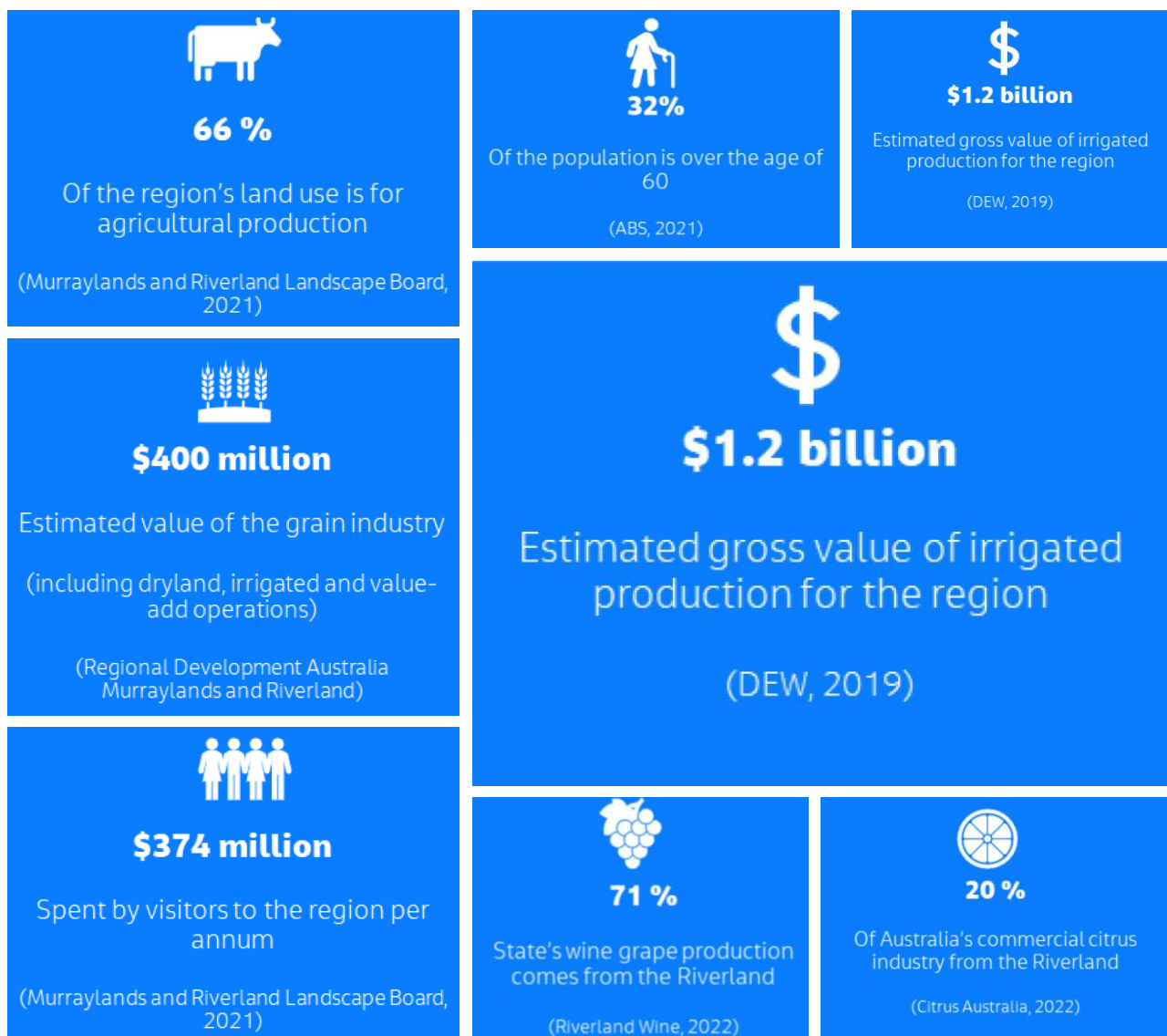


REGIONAL STATISTICS

The Murraylands and Riverland's Gross Regional Product is estimated at **\$4.64 billion**, which represents 3.73% of the state's GSP (Gross State Product).

GRP \$4.64 billion NIEIR 2022	Population 73,243 ABS ERP 2022	Local jobs 31,137 NIEIR 2022
Largest industry (by employment) Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing NIEIR 2022	Local businesses 6,672 ABS 2022	Employed Residents 32,496 NIEIR 2022

In the Murraylands and Riverland region, Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing had the largest total **exports** by industry, generating **\$2.736 billion** in 2021/22.



PRESIDENT'S REPORT



*MRLGA President
Mayor Caroline Phillips*

The Murraylands and Riverland Local Government Association, along with its eight constituent councils, continued in 23/24 towards its goal of working collaboratively to be a unified local government sector working in the best interest of the region and our communities.

As Regional Councils continue their amazing efforts across the state to serve local communities, it was important that in our role as listeners and leaders we take time to talk to our neighbouring councils about shared regional issues and opportunities. Through this collaboration we set ourselves up for greater conversations, the sharing of ideas and solutions, networking, co-operation, efficiencies, support and progress. And on behalf of the Association, I wish to thank everyone, including Board Members, CEO's, Committee Members and staff for your ongoing collaborating as a sector. It is through collaboration we can achieve our goal of unity, and together we are stronger.

As we reflect on the achievements of the 2023/24 year, I am proud of the progress made by the Murraylands and Riverland Local Government Association (MRLGA) towards our vision of creating attractive, liveable, and prosperous communities. Our work this year has remained grounded in our mission to build strong and continued relationships that support the region to be a unified local government sector working in the best interest of the region and our communities, as well as fostering partnerships, and enhancing regional efficiencies. With the support of our councils and partners, we continue to drive forward strategic initiatives that improve regional infrastructure, social resilience, and environmental sustainability.

Key achievements and highlights throughout the year have included:

Transport and Infrastructure

One great achievement in 2023/24 has been the continued collaboration and coordination across Council infrastructure teams to oversee the Regional Transport Plan and associated database of roads. This year, the Regional Transport Committee secured a remarkable \$4.5 million in funding through the Special Local Roads Program (SLRP) for priority road upgrades across councils. These projects are essential for maintaining and enhancing road infrastructure that supports economic growth and connects communities. This is the largest package obtained through SLRP for the region since inception of the program and a credit to all Council Director's and their infrastructure teams for their forward integrated planning and shovel ready agility. We have also made headway in reviewing and updating the Regional Road Hierarchy, identifying key areas for improvement and future planning. Through the utilization of Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping, we are improving the efficiency and safety of our transport networks.

Environment – Waste Management

Waste management remains a critical focus for many councils, given its status as one of the largest and most enduring service contracts delivered. In 2023/24, significant efforts were made to align our strategic vision with our capacity for implementation. Working closely with our constituent councils, the MRLGA has structured two new positions within the waste management portfolio: Circular Economy and Waste Lead, and Educational Program Lead. These appointments, made in September and October 2024, are pivotal in advancing our regional waste management initiatives. We are confident these roles will enhance our ability to deliver on key strategies, strengthening our regional capacity in waste management and sustainability efforts.

Environmental – Water Advocacy

Our advocacy for sustainable water management has been elevated through the finalization of the Water Advocacy Paper. The paper, which has undergone thorough consultation, addresses the critical issue of water security in the face of upcoming federal reforms. This initiative highlights MRLGA's commitment to supporting the region's agricultural backbone and securing water resources for future generations.

The Water Advocacy Paper has been a pivotal project, focusing on the region's water security in light of impending reforms, and a way to initiate South Australian Councils to discuss the needs, risks and opportunity's that present for the community's, with particular regard for those at the top near the border, and those in the south near the Coorong and Lakes.

Public Health and Wellbeing

With several economic challenges facing the region in the last 24 months, from flood impacts and recovery, wine grape growing, fruit fly, water recovery and emerging dry conditions, coupled with cost of living pressures, withdrawal of GP's and associated services in smaller township areas, the region has observed the demand for mental health and wellbeing support growing, and growing well beyond the system's capacity. This has been supported by recent data sheets from Preventive Health SA, local networks and the Public Health and Wellbeing Committees feedback to the SA Health as part of its Section 52 reporting. Renmark Paringa Council, Mayor Hunter led the groups awareness to the report on Rural Mental Health Services Review¹ and gained support from the MRLGA Board and later SAROC and LGA to support the report's entire list of 22 recommendations and encourage the State to implement the recommendations for regional areas.

In 23/24 individual Councils performed tremendous work for public health and wellbeing, including flood recovery, community resilience, wellness hubs, response to Japanese Encephalitis, mental health workshops and presentations, child care initiatives, advocacy for GP's, community projects, sport activation and more. MRLGA supported the research and development application for the continuation of the Flood Wellbeing role, that was successful. It continued to build a strong relationship with Foundation SA, that provides the back-end support for community run and community led foundations, hoping to see if this can emerge to be a more prevalent model in the region as economic challenges and opportunity's lie ahead. It facilitated the Connected and Activate Community's (CAC) program with Office of Recreation Sport and Racing (ORSR) to come into the region. And worked with Berri Barmera Council, District Council of Loxton Waikerie and Renmark Paringa Council to establish the 3 year partnership. The program was handed over to Councils to deliver, and District Council of Loxton Waikerie is hosting a shared role. Next year MRLGA will facilitate learnings and insight from the program to shared with neighbouring councils as we look to widen and grow the CAC program further into the region. And in 2023/24, significant efforts were made to align our strategic vision with our capacity for implementation, following which it has engaged in discussions with Preventive Health for a partnership in the region, that will have further announcements in 24/25.

Emergency Response and Recovery

The 22/23 River Murray flood was declared as one of the State's most significant natural disaster events. Recovery for many Councils and community's has been enduring and ongoing who were critically impacted by the event. MRLGA hosted the Deputy Premier in July 2023 at its board meeting Taillem Bend, and provided the collective group of Councils to discuss flood related impacts and opportunity's as well as regional items. More notably was the discussion around the 23/24 budget not including any mental health and wellbeing support for the flood, and post the awareness and advocacy of this gap, the region later received funding for mental health and wellbeing coming into community's.

Later in the year, the MRLGA Board collectively agreed to conduct a joint flood observations report in Nov/Dec 2023 to look at common strategic learnings from the flood. This report informed a submission to the Independent Inquiry reviewing the River Murray Flood, as well as presentations by key representatives from Berri Barmera Council, Mid Murray Council, Renmark Paringa Council and Coorong District Council. The draft report has been advised to the Zone Emergency Management Committee as a precursor to have all the authorities submit lessons learned reports that can later support positive change. In Q4, MRLGA has been a platform for flood recovery discussions as the region moves closer to its 2 year anniversary. It will continue to work with flood impacted councils as their recovery journeys ensue.

Economic Development and Digital Connectivity

Economic development in the Murraylands and Riverland continues to be a key priority for everyone in the region. In light of 3G withdrawing from the telecommunications service network, the MRLGA initiated a Regional Digital Connectivity Strategy. This strategy will centralise the regions 'digital connectivity' story and is one tool being used to advance advocacy and regional telecommunications. NBN Co, as a Government Business Enterprise (GBE) has a remit to design, build, and operate the National Broadband Network (NBN), however it is also there to advance regional digital connectivity (of all platforms and methods). NBN Co has performed data gathering and intelligence to form the foundations of a strategy (currently under development).

The region's economic potential remains high but has regrettably been negatively disrupted through many external influences such as the wine industry downturn and china export limits, fruit fly, state emergency flood, drought, water reform and to some extent limited housing to support regional workforce uplift. The relationship across all agency's seeking economic growth is continued to be enhanced as the region works across federal, state and local government lines with its industries, investors and community to collaborate, leverage opportunity's and support place-based solutions.

¹ <https://www.chiefpsychiatrist.sa.gov.au/policies-standards-and-reports/reports/strategic-and-policy-matters/rural-mental-health-services-review>

Looking Ahead

As we enter the 2024/25 period, we remain committed to addressing the evolving needs of our communities. Key priorities will include expanding digital connectivity, advancing our regional waste management story and measuring targets, trialling projects that deliver operational efficiencies for councils, and continuing to advocate for infrastructure investments. Collaboration with regional partners and government bodies will be continue to grow to achieve our goals and ensuring sustainable growth for the Murraylands and Riverland.

In closing, I would like to thank the MRLGA Board, CEO Carron McLeod, and the councils for their dedication and leadership throughout the year. Together, we will continue to work towards a vibrant and resilient region.

In Closing

I wish to thank all constituent councils and MRLGA Board Members for the opportunity to be the MRLGA President. The work and service undertaken by our CEO for the Association is valued and I can see our cumulative team work, cooperation and collaboration building with each year passing.

I also wish to thank Deputy President, Mayor Ella Winnall for joining me in leading the association. Mayor Winnall excels in her leadership and responsibilities with her Council and community, as well as a key regional influence for strategic responses and initiatives.

To Mayor Paul Simmons, I also extend our thanks and appreciation for representing the region through involvement in the SA Regional Organisation of Councils. Mayor Simmons brings years of capable and respected experience to meetings with his wide knowledge on road infrastructure and local government and we value the voluntary time and commitment to SAROC meetings as well as the constitutional review planning days.

As I look to the next 12-18 months, I see the benefit of platforms like MRLGA for regional, rural and remote Councils. Being the closest level of government to community's, it is important the sector demonstrates to State and Federal Governments that we are a coordinated and cohesive sector as we approach place based strategy's and advocating for communities.

We also acknowledge the Mayors and Councilors who have served the second of a four-year term to its communities. There's a lot of work that goes unseen in roles, plenty of expectation and a responsibility to carry out our duties in the interest of all, with impartiality. Congratulations on your achievements in the second year, and together we can continue growing the regional community of 73,000 onwards and upwards.

Lastly, as change naturally occurs in the region and we endeavor to keep up with the pressure, expectations and an emerging modern world, it highlights the importance of collaboration. We exist beyond our own council boundaries and quite often we can gain more by working together at all levels of Council and all levels of Government. Thank you again for the work you do in all regional communities and the MRLGA looks forward to consolidating on its current work, as together we collaborate, identify and advance the sector where we can for the benefit of the region and our community's.

Mayor Caroline Phillips
MRLGA President

MRLGA Board

BOARD	Vice President Berri Barmera Council  Mayor Ella Winnall +8 Councillors	Coorong District Council  Mayor Paul Simmons +7 Councillors SAROC Rep	President District Council of Karoonda East Murray  Mayor Caroline Phillips +6 Councillors SAROC Rep	District Council of Loxton Waikerie  Mayor Trevor Norton +10 Councillors	Mid Murray Council  Mayor Simone Bailey +8 Councillors	Renmark Paringa Council  Mayor Peter Hunter +8 Councillors	Rural City of Murray Bridge  Mayor Wayne Thorley +9 Councillors	Southern Mallee District Council  Mayor Ron Valentine +6 Councillors
	CEO  Tim Pfeiffer	CEO  Bridget Mather	CEO  Scott Reardon	CEO  David Beaton	CEO  Ben Scales	CEO  Tony Siviour	CEO  Heather Barclay	CEO  Lachlan Miller
	Murraylands and Riverland LGA  Carron McLeod							

Board Members

Berri Barmera Council (BBC)	Mayor Ella Winnall (Deputy President)
Coorong District Council (CDC)	Mayor Paul Simmons
District Council of Karoonda East Murray (DCKEM)	Mayor Caroline Phillips (President)
District Council of Loxton Waikerie (DCLW)	Mayor Trevor Norton
Mid Murray Council (MMC)	Mayor Simone Bailey
Renmark Paringa Council (RPC)	Mayor Peter Hunter
Rural City of Murray Bridge (RCMB)	Mayor Wayne Thorley
Southern Mallee District Council (SMDC)	Mayor Ron Valentine

Deputy Delegates (Proxy Members)

Berri Barmera Council (BBC)	Cr Trevor Scott
Coorong District Council (CDC)	Cr Jeff Arthur
District Council of Loxton Waikerie (DCLW)	Cr Clive Matthews
District Council Karoonda East Murray (DCKEM)	Cr Russell Norman
Mid Murray Council (MMC)	Cr Jen Davis and Cr John Forrester
Renmark Paringa Council (RPC)	Cr Margaret Howie
Rural City of Murray Bridge (RCMB)	Cr Andrew Baltensperger
Southern Mallee District Council (SMDC)	Cr Chris Mead

South Australian Regional Organisation of Councils (SAROC) Representatives

Coorong District Council (CDC)	Mayor Paul Simmons
District Council of Karoonda East Murray	Mayor Caroline Phillips (MRLGA President)

CEO Network

Berri Barmera Council	Dylan Strong
	(Acting) Craig Grocke
	Tim Pfeiffer
Coorong District Council	Bridget Mather
District Council of Loxton Waikerie	David Beaton
District Council of Karoonda East Murray	Martin Borgas
	(Acting) Peter Bond
	Scott Reardon
Mid Murray Council	Ben Scales
Renmark Paringa Council	Tony Siviour
	(Acting) Tim Pfeiffer
	(Acting) Tim Tol
Rural City of Murray Bridge	Heather Barclay
Southern Mallee District Council	Matthew Sherman
	Lachlan Miller
Murraylands and Riverland Local Government Association	Carron McLeod

MRLGA CEO Network and Committees

At the January 2023 Board Meeting, Committees were rationalised to 1 representative per Council, creating a committee of 8 people, plus MRLGA CEO and President. Membership is as follows.

Regional Transport and Asset Committee

BBC	David Pluckhahn	Manager Infrastructure Services
CDC	Matt James	Director Infrastructure & Assets
	(Acting) Shanti Ditter	
	Joshua Bowen	
DCLW	Greg Perry	Director of Infrastructure Services
DCKEM	Calvin Hoyer	General Manager, Infrastructure
MMC	David Hassett	Director Infrastructure & Field Services
RPC	Tarik Wolf	Director Infrastructure & Environmental Services
RCMB	(Acting) Tim Tol	General Manager Assets & Infrastructure
	Thuyen Vi-Alternetti	
SMDC	Lachlan Miller	CEO
MRLGA	Carron McLeod	CEO
MRLGA	Mayor Caroline Philips	Ex officio, MRLGA President

Regional Public Health and Wellbeing Committee

BBC	Andrew Haigh	Manager Community Development
CDC	Myles Somers	Director Community and Corporate Services
DCKEM	Katrina Fromm	Deputy Chief Executive Officer
	Martin Borgas	Ceo
	Paulina Koritsa	Acting Director Organisational Support
DCLW	Andrew Waters	Director Commercial and Community Services
MMC	(Acting) Natalie Davis	Manager - Community Services
	Gary Mavrinac	Director - Development & Community Services
RPC	Tim Pfeiffer	Manager Community Development
	Dave Burgess	Director Corporate and Community Services
	(Acting) Tim Tol	
RCMB	Kriston Manson	General Manager Community Development

SMDC	Shilo Wyatt	Manager Property & Development Services
MRLGA	Mayor Caroline Philips	Ex officio, MRLGA President
MRLGA	Carron McLeod	Chief Executive Officer

Regional Waste & Resource Recovery Committee

BBC	David Pluckhahn	Manager Infrastructure Services
CDC	Matt James	Director Infrastructure & Assets
	(Acting) Shanti Ditter	
	Joshua Bowen	
DCLW	Greg Perry	Director of Infrastructure Services
DCKEM	Calvin Hoye	General Manager, Infrastructure
MMC	David Hassett	Director Infrastructure & Field Services
RPC	Tarik Wolf	Director Infrastructure & Environmental Services
RCMB	(Acting) Tim Tol	General Manager Assets & Infrastructure
	Thuyen Vi-Alternetti	
SMDC	Lachlan Miller	CEO
MRLGA	Carron McLeod	CEO
MRLGA	Mayor Caroline Philips	Ex officio, MRLGA President

Performance Management Working Group (associated with the joint Waste Services Contracts) for 5 Councils (as listed):

BBC	David Pluckhahn	Manager Infrastructure Services
	Tracey Alexander	Manager Environment & Regulatory Services
CDC	Matt James	Director Infrastructure & Assets
	(Acting) Shanti Ditter	
	Joshua Bowen	
	Courtney Tyler	EA to Director
	Travis Hay	Acting Director
DCLW	Greg Perry	Director of Infrastructure Services
	Kelly Michella	Works Project Officer
RPC	Tarik Wolf	Director Infrastructure & Environmental Services
	Terri Hentschke	EA to Director
RCMB	Thuyen Vi-Alternetti	General Manager of Infrastructure Services
	Sue Reynolds	Manager City Assets
MRLGA	Carron McLeod	CEO

Zone Emergency Management (Chaired by SES)

MRLGA Representative:

MRLGA	Carron McLeod	CEO (Attendee)
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Murraylands Riverland (Drought Resilience) Plan, Steering Committee Representatives

Notes :

- In 2021, approximately \$400k Drought Resilience Planning grant was led by PIRSA/RDAMR, with Landscape board (MR) and MRLGA as partners.
- The steering committee last convened on 2 March 2023 following the CSIRO feedback and completion of the Plan. Following which a 'Coalition of the Willing' was to be formed/established.

	D. Mutton	(Chair)
RDA MR	Ben Fee	CEO
PIRSA	Barb Cowey	Regional Co ordinator
Landscape Board MR	Andrew Meddle	CEO

MRLGA	Carron McLeod	CEO
Murraylands Council	Michael Sedgman	CEO, Rural City Murray Bridge
Riverland Council	David Beaton	CEO, District Council Loxton Waikerie
C.I.T	Greg McCarron	Community Representative
	H. Loller	Community Representative
	W. Jackson	Murraylands and Riverland Aboriginal Representative
	Sheryl Giles	Murraylands and Riverland Aboriginal Representative

MRLGA Board:

The MRLGA Board met quarterly. Membership of the Board is filled by the Principal Members (Mayor) of each Constituent Council. Meetings of the Board were held on:

1. Friday 21 July 2023
2. Friday 20 October 2023
3. Thursday 1 February 2024
4. Thursday 18 April 2024

The meetings of the Board also provided a forum for updates and/or presentations from:

- LGA SA Secretariat
- PIRSA
- Regional Development Australia, Murraylands and Riverland
- Landscape Board, Murraylands and Riverland Wellbeing SA (now Preventive Health)
- Office of Small and Family Business
- Murray and Mallee Public Transport
- SA Drought Hub
- One Basin CRC
- DPC, Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO), State Digital Connectivity
- Zone Emergency Management Committee
- Murray Darling Association – Region 5 and Region 6
- Members of Parliament

SA Regional Organisation of Councils

The South Australian Regional Organisation of Councils (SAROC) is a Committee of the LGA that meets bimonthly to focus on key issues affecting country Councils.

MRLGA representatives at SAROC in 2023/24 were President, Mayor Caroline Phillips (of District Council of Karoonda East Murray) and Mayor Paul Simmons (of Coorong District Council).

MRLGA supports SAROC by attending meetings, preparing regional reports and creating discussion at regional quarterly board meetings to inform content in/out of SAROC. The committee met on:

- 20 July 2023 LGA Offices, Adelaide
- 21 September 2023 LGA Offices, Adelaide
- 16 November 2023 Hosted by Mid Murray Council
- 18 January 2024 LGA Offices, Adelaide
- 14 March 2024 LGA Offices, Adelaide
- 16 May 2024 LGA Offices, Adelaide

A link to the 2023-24 SAROC Annual Business Plan is provided below outlining the key priorities, projects and deliverables set by the region for LGA.

https://www.lga.sa.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0035/875177/SAROC-2023-24-Annual-Business-Plan.pdf

Motions coming from the region into SAROC this year included:

Renmark Paringa Council	Sought LGA to endorse the recommendations in the Rural Mental Health Services Review and encourage the State to implement the recommendations for regional areas. https://www.chiefpsychiatrist.sa.gov.au/policies-standards-and-reports/reports/strategic-and-policy-matters/rural-mental-health-services-review
Mid Murray Council	Mayor Bailey presented to SAROC on 16 May 2024 seeking greater awareness and action for the financial sustainability of Councils and greater equity in the disbursement of FA grants. MMC specifically called for LGA to convene a round table for councils on financial sustainability.
Coorong District Council	Update on the status of advocacy for supplementary funding for SA and overall road funding.

CEO Network

The MRLGA CEO Network is established as a strategic advisory group to the MRLGA Board as well as to assist and advise the MRLGA CEO in governance, project delivery and the development and implementation of the Annual Business Plan, or other plans. As the name suggests its membership is the CEOs of the eight constituent councils. The Charter outlines at Clause 7.11.8 that the Network will operate on an informal basis, and is therefore not subject to formal meeting procedures.

The Network provided a range of support including oversight, updates, feedback, guidance and discussion regarding :

• Waste and Resource Recovery Strategy	<i>Resolved the contracts model and future resourcing and capacity model at MRLGA</i>
• Regional Digital Connectivity Plan	<i>Agreed to expand the scope at MRLGA and develop a regional plan that will support future funding opportunities</i>
• Flood Recovery	<i>Preparing a draft regional flood observations report (intended to be further developed into a lessons learned report). Submission to the independent flood inquiry Facilitated an MOU offer with Australian Psychological Society (APS) for disaster recovery. Collaboration and strategic positioning regarding the States \$9m 'Council Community and Recreational Asset Restoration Program'.</i>
• Infrastructure SA	<i>Joint Ceo Meeting with Infrastructure SA to provide input and feedback to the States 20 Year Strategy, specifically with regions in mind.</i>
• MR (Drought Resilience) Plan	<i>Advice regarding ongoing Monitoring and Evaluation process of the MR (Drought Resilience) Plan and seed funding.</i>
• Governance	<i>Voting procedures (for President) when the role has an attached allowance.</i>
• Economic Development	<i>Joint Workshop to discuss economic development models / networks across the Murraylands, Coorong and Mallee Councils.</i>
• Office of Recreation Sport and Racing	<i>Connected and Active Communities Program 3 Year Partnership with all three Riverland Councils and ORSR.</i>
• Regional (Growth) Plans	<i>Liaised with Councils to resolve the status of the plan and re-zoning applications.</i>

The MRLGA wishes to acknowledge the enormous dedication that regional CEO's play each and every day in our region to:

- Support healthy teams and cultures amongst staff and working environments at Council's
- Guiding successful services, governance, reporting and oversight to Council operations
- Providing leadership, strategic thinking and professionalism to the local government sector and more.

The role they play is instrumental in setting the tone of successful Council operations, and without them the MRLGA would not be as enhanced and capable as it is without them, both individually and collectively.

Zone Emergency Management Committee

The Committee welcome a new Chair for 23/24, Ms Heather Barclay from Rural City of Murray Bridge.

Meetings are convened by SES and were held on the following dates of which MRLGA had attendance and input towards:

- 30 August 2023
- 22 November 2023
- 21 March 2024
- 15 May 2024

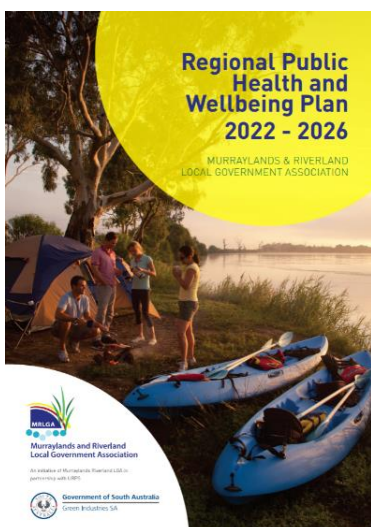
Placed Based Regional Strategies

When regional councils develop a strategy together, they can leverage collective strengths and address shared challenges. The benefits include:

1. **Resource Efficiency and Cost Sharing:** Collaborating on a strategy allows councils to pool resources, reducing the cost burden on individual councils. Shared services, infrastructure, and expertise can result in significant savings and better resource allocation.
2. **Stronger Regional Advocacy:** A unified regional strategy gives councils a stronger voice when advocating for state or federal funding. It allows them to present a cohesive, region-wide vision, which can attract larger-scale investment and government support.
3. **Holistic Planning:** Working together enables councils to address broader issues that transcend local boundaries, such as economic development, transport networks, and environmental management. This leads to more balanced and sustainable regional growth.
4. **Shared Knowledge and Best Practices:** Collaboration fosters the exchange of ideas, knowledge, and successful initiatives. Councils can learn from each other's experiences, adopting best practices in governance, planning, and service delivery.
5. **Improved Resilience and Crisis Management:** Joint strategies are especially beneficial for managing regional crises, such as droughts, natural disasters, or economic downturns. Councils can coordinate their efforts, share resources, and develop more robust contingency plans to enhance regional resilience.

These benefits can lead to stronger, more sustainable communities through cooperation and shared vision.

The following is an update on the regional plans and strategies:



The Regional Public Health and Wellbeing Plan is a statutory plan under the Public Health and Wellbeing Act.

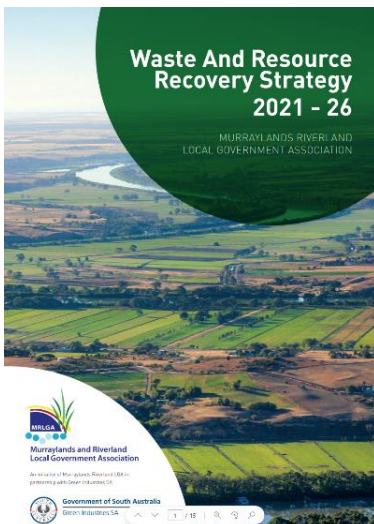
It is overseen by the MRLGA Regional Public Health and Wellbeing Committee. The Committee includes one Director, from each of the 8 constituent Councils.

Key activities and advancements in 2023/24:

- **State - Statutory Reporting:** Completed the Section 52 (Public Health Act 2011) report for the South Australian Chief Public Health Officer, a comprehensive update on council responsibilities under public health legislation, submitted bi-annually.
- **Partnership with Office of Recreation, Sport and Racing (ORSR):** Secured a three-year partnership under the Connected and Active Communities Program. Collaborated with ORSR and local councils (Berri Barmera, Loxton Waikerie, Renmark Paringa) on research and program delivery to enhance community connection and activity (through recreation and sport). District Council of Loxton Waikerie is leading the implementation, and

MRLGA will liaise with ORSR and Councils to see where opportunities lie to expand and build the program regionally.

- **Australian Psychological Society (APS):** Facilitated Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) between APS and councils post-River Murray flood, providing free mental health support for staff from qualified psychologists.
- **Community Recovery Fund:** Participated as a panel member assessing NGO grant applications for flood recovery funding. This program was administered by the Recovery Coordinator.
- **Emergency Management:** Engaged in disaster response and planning through participation in the Murray and Mallee Zone Emergency Management Committee. It also attended Local Government Association (LGA) sessions regarding feedback and input to its submission to the State regarding the review of the Emergency Management Act.
- **Wellbeing Partnership (Advocacy Post-Flood):** Advocated for continued mental health and wellbeing funding after the peak of the flood (after the 23/24 budget recorded no funding). Overall the partnership with Wellbeing SA resulted in an additional \$315k of funding coming into the region for wellbeing support at a local government level.
- **LGA Alignment:** Ongoing collaboration with the LGA Wellbeing Officer and Wellbeing SA (now Preventive Health) to advance wellbeing and preventive health initiatives across the sector.
- **"Grow Your Own" Planner:** Contributed to project scoping, hosted information sessions for councils, and promoted this workforce development initiative in the region.
- **Red Cross Collaboration:** Supported Red Cross and its application to National Emergency Management Agency for resilient community programs.
- **University collaboration:** liaised with University of South Australia who received grant funding for a 'welcoming migrants to regional areas' piece. It is lined to Welcoming Cities [:https://welcomingcities.org.au/](https://welcomingcities.org.au/) and provided regional insights and contacts to inform the scope of their work



The Regional Waste & Resource Recovery Strategy (and associated Implementation Plan) is a statutory plan. In South Australia, waste management targets for councils are primarily determined by the Green Industries SA (GISA) agency, operating under the Green Industries SA Act 2004. GISA leads the state's waste management and resource recovery strategies, providing guidance, grants, and policy direction. The South Australian Waste Strategy 2020-2025, developed by Green Industries SA, outlines key waste management targets, including reducing landfill, increasing recycling, and improving resource recovery. It aligns with South Australia's overall environmental goals, and councils are required to work within this framework.

Additionally, the Environment Protection Act 1993, administered by the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) South Australia, also plays a role in regulating waste management activities, particularly concerning environmental protection standards. Councils are expected to adhere to the targets and strategies set forth by these agencies and legislative acts when managing waste within their jurisdictions.

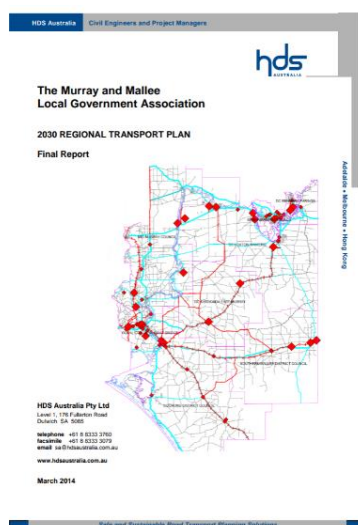
The regional strategy is overseen by the MRLGA Regional Public Health and Wellbeing Committee. The Committee includes one Director, from each of the 8 constituent Councils.

Key activities included:

- **Established a Regional Performance Management Working Group (PMWG)** with representation from all five regional councils involved in the joint waste services contract. The group meets

quarterly and is formed under the governance structure outlined in the contracts. The working group offers Councils an opportunity to unite; and to collate challenges and opportunity's in a cohesive and efficient manner across the region, working towards solutions for improved performance via the waste service contract.

- **Filled the resource gap**, a resource and funding proposal was successfully supported and endorsed by the Committee, PMWG, Ceo Network and Board that better positions Councils and the Association to deliver on initiatives in the Strategy.
- **Fostered partnerships with other councils for waste education.** Through collaboration, a joint Education Officer has been established at MRLGA as a shared resource to all five Councils to support delivery of improved services.
- **Waste reform**, MRLGA convened the Committee to provide an overview of draft legislation (currently before cabinet). Ensuring any legislative changes are being tabled with the Committee helps regional capability and allows the group to initiate advocacy if/when legislative changes may impact regional services/Councils.



The Regional Transport Plan is the result of collaboration across Councils to have a cohesive road network, and it also conforms to the Local Government Transport Advisory Panel (LGTAP) needs.

The regional plan is overseen by the MRLGA Regional Transport Committee. The Committee includes the Directors of Infrastructure from each of the 8 constituent councils.

This year, MRLGA in consultation with its Regional Transport Committee secured a remarkable \$4.5 million in funding through the Special Local Roads Program (SLRP) for priority road upgrades across councils. These projects are essential for maintaining and enhancing road infrastructure that supports economic growth and connects communities. This is the largest package obtained through SLRP for the region since inception of the program and a credit to all Council Director's and their infrastructure teams for their forward integrated planning and shovel ready agility.



The Water Advocacy Paper was completed in 23/24.

The paper was a collaborative piece of work to facilitate early discussions across MDA regions 5 and 6, ahead of stakeholder engagement for Murray Darling Basin Plan (2.0).

The benefits of the paper include:

- Central document for all elected members and other agency's businesses, peak body's, first peoples, and community to be able to familiarise themselves with many of the complex and inter-related issues regarding Murray Darling Basin.
- Acknowledge the regions dependency on water, and begin to decipher the role Local Government can play in water advocacy and water management,
- Identify advocacy topics to support local and regional communities, industries, the environment, first nations and stakeholders,
- Identify opportunities if/when all levels of government can collaborate for the betterment of easier process' and less politicised environments
- Identify opportunities where Local Government can adopt best practice water management principles as well as plan for and respond to moments of flood and drought.

The document is accompanied by a Regional Profile that outlines the evidence and statistics that form the points within the advocacy paper.

In addition to incremental progress with the above strategy's the Association also delivered :

- **Submission to the Independent Inquiry reviewing the River Murray Flood**
(and the development of a Regional Flood Observations Report (draft))
- **Submission to the Federal Inquiry reviewing Local Government Sustainability**

Below is an extract from the 28 page submission to the Independent Inquiry reviewing the River Murray Flood:

Councils agreed to undertake a joint observations style review as a group to inform a submission to the Inquiry. It organised for an independent consultant to facilitate a process and gather experiences and observations from across the local government region. These experiences were collected from interviews with 28 local government representatives across six Councils (and MRLGA), each of whom were actively involved in leading and delivering flood response activities. The process looked at the following areas:

- Overall performance
- Leadership, governance and incident management
- Inter-agency coordination
- Evidence-based planning
- Levees and mitigation works
- Financial management
- People and culture
- Communication and community engagement and
- Lessons management.

As the process evolved and we listened to people's observations, it showed some experiences were shared and some were/are unique to local areas. Learning this, MRLGA sees it crucial to acknowledge that context is so important when retelling experiences to an event of this kind. To further elaborate on this, some contextual settings are outlined below (but are not limited too):

- *There is approximately 493km of river spanning across six municipalities and approximately 58 communities and townships. Each has varying typography, riverbanks, flood plains, altitude, infrastructure, land uses, agriculture, horticulture, housing variety and environmental conditions, and therefore nuance in how the flood interacts with these features and thus creating a multitude of scenarios. As such there were similar and different flood situations occurring over the course the flood event.*
- *Not only did the 'event' span months in duration (and recovery, years) there was a noticeable sequence (ie Renmark Paringa Council as the first marker and Coorong District Council as the last marker and base of the flood that flowed into the expansive lakes). Sequencing is a contextual factor people noticed and very relevant to slow onset moving events across vast distances, where systems and approaches improve as the event unfolds and moves south.*

These contextual examples begin to show the varying nature of experiences had by all and where there may be any nuance. Whilst more is provided in the submission, this was a factor MRLGA often referred too when reflecting on experiences from the event.

The MRLGA recognises that this process is not exhaustive, and there will be ongoing times through recovery and rebuilding when observations and lessons learned continue to be unearthed and realised. And whilst it has gathered some of the lived experiences from the sector, we too will need to continue work to assess the experiences and observations to then form the best solution(s) for change.

The completion of this process has however offered some key insights highlighted.

Factors that contributed to the overall success for local government included:

- *clarity of councils' objectives in keeping their communities safe*
- *the significant, sustained and prolonged efforts of council staff and leaders*
- *clear and practical incident management and recovery structures that built upon pre-existing plans*
- *councils' ability to engage and work with contractors*
- *the assistance provided by the broader local government sector*
- *collaborative working relationships with state agencies, and coordination through the ZEST*
- *councils' ability to be agile and respond to challenges that were rapidly developing*

Whilst some (not all) of the key challenges identified included:

- *the slow onset and long duration nature of the flood, meant typical emergency response approaches needed to be adjusted*
- *limited and changing information on water volumes and expected flood heights*
- *managing staff fatigue and wellbeing over extended periods of time*
- *balancing business-as-usual service delivery with flood response activities*
- *responding to (non-local) media inquiries, when (at times) it sought sensational content*
- *managing the financial implications of the flood, especially navigating the eligibility criteria, evidence, acquittal and reimbursement processes of disaster funding programs*

The basis of this draft report may be further used as part of overall lessons learned processes by the State, SES and ZEMC advance.

Below is a small extract from the 10 page submission to the Federal Inquiry reviewing Local Government Sustainability:

The objective of the inquiry was outlined as : "The committee is seeking to understand the challenges faced by local governments in servicing infrastructure requirements across Australia's regional, rural, and remote locations." And that the "committee is aware of significant public infrastructure workforce shortages, particularly in local government areas, and the importance of promoting skills development and job security for Australians".

We particularly welcome the committee's differentiation for regional, rural and remote locations as this distinguishing nuance is integral to the umbrella topic of "sustainability" for the sector. Whilst Local Government is one tier of Government, quite often there are three (or more) informal tiers within itself. Each often face differing challenges on the topic of 'sustainability' and therefore the solution(s) for sustainability are/will be different for each.

The following statistics were extrapolated from Councils audited financial statements to form the basis of advocacy points to discuss 'sustainability' facing regional and rural local government areas:

- *In 23/24 Councils (in the Murraylands and Riverland region) received an approximate total of \$23.074m of FA Grants. This divided amongst a regional population of 73,771 people is approximately \$312 per person the Commonwealth provided Local Government to service its community's.*
- *On average, the regions Councils collect \$1,132 per person through rate revenue*
- *The regional asset portfolio of all Councils combined is approximately \$1.5 Billion.*
- *3-5 Councils (of the 8) received / obtained less than 0.50% in additional grants. One Council being as low as 14%. As such the broad application / theory that 0.5% of tied grants are successful in regional areas is unsubstantiated. This has a compounding effect causing a greater divide and gap in regional and rural councils to be sustainable.*

In South Australia, a Local Government Advice Scheme was created through ESCOSA to conduct a financial review of Councils.

'Under the Scheme, the Commission (ESCOSA) is an advisory body, providing advice to all councils across a four-year cycle. The aim of the Scheme is to provide independent, risk-based advice to assist councils when making long-term financial and investment decisions for the benefit of ratepayers.'

Each Council is required to pay a flat fee of \$40,000 to ESCOSA for its review.

- *There are 50 Regional Councils (with a total number of electors at approximately 366,758).*
- *With each regional Council paying \$40,000, this totals \$2,000,000 (for a financial audit).*
- *There are 18 Metro Councils (with a total number of electors at approximately 924,011). With each paying \$40,000, this totals \$720,000 (for a financial audit).*
- *Regional areas are subsidising 557,253 people to the value of \$1.28m.*
- *The total ESCOSA Audit (to baseline figures) is \$2.72m (not considering inflation over the 4 years).*

In addition to looking within the regional sector for collaboration, efficiency, shared resources, knowledge or other opportunities, the Association collaborated other Regional LGA's.

Regional LGA's, Chief Executive Officers

The Regional LGA's CEO Group is an informal meeting of Executive Officers of the Regional Local Government Associations. Functions of the Management Group include:

- Provide input into SAROC Business Plan and the Agenda
- Develop a working relationship with the LGA Management team
- Advocate on behalf of the regions and regional initiatives
- Share information and provide collegiate support
- Coordinate collaborative project activity

Meetings of the Management Group were held on:

- 11 September 2023
- 13 November 2023
- 8 February 2024
- 27 May 2024
- 8 April 2024 (online)

The Association also availed itself to other opportunities occurring in the region including:

Future Drought Fund

In 20/21 two South Australian regions were selected to participate in a pilot year to develop Regional Drought Resilience Plans. The plans in SA were funded by the Australian Government's Future Drought Fund Program: Regional Drought Resilience Planning Program to the approximate value of \$1.18m.

The MRLGA were invited to participate in a joint partnership with Regional Development Australia, Murraylands and Riverland (RDAMR) and Landscape Board, Murraylands and Riverland to develop a regional drought resilience plan.

For more information on the background, process or a copy of the plan, please visit:



- MR (Drought Resilience) Plan landing page
<https://www.mrplan.com.au/theplan>
- The Process
[https://rdamr.com.au/information/mrplan/#:~:text=The%20Murraylands%20and%20Riverland%20Plan%20\(MR%20Plan\)%20is%20about%20supporting,Riverland%20towards%20achieving%20this%20vision.](https://rdamr.com.au/information/mrplan/#:~:text=The%20Murraylands%20and%20Riverland%20Plan%20(MR%20Plan)%20is%20about%20supporting,Riverland%20towards%20achieving%20this%20vision.)
- Future Drought Fund, Regional Drought Resilience Program
<https://www.agriculture.gov.au/agriculture-land/farm-food-drought/drought/future-drought-fund/regional-drought-resilience-planning#daff-page-main>

The Murraylands and Riverland (MR) (Drought Resilience) Plan was finalised as draft in May 2022 and submitted to PIRSA and CSIRO for review. In November 2022 CSIRO released a report on its review and provided 19 items of feedback. The Steering Committee reviewed the feedback and comments to the CSIRO report were submitted back as part of next steps to the funding program.

In August 2024, PIRSA advised that seed funding for the program would be available and the partnership is working together on the initiative.

Operational (external) Service Agreements

The list below outlines the Service Agreements MRLGA held in 23/24 to support operations or initiatives:

- Payroll and BAS services provided by EKM Accounting
- Formula Accounting for accounting services to prepare the independent audited financial statements
- Rawtec Consulting (associated with the Waste and Resource Recovery Strategy).
- Aurora Meliora Consulting (associated with the Public Health and Wellbeing Strategy)
- HRM Matters Consulting (for a joint workshop with all eight councils, MRLGA and Regional development Australia, Murraylands and Riverland)

Thank you

To the MRLGA Board, CEO Network, Committees, Berri Barmera Council, Coorong District Council, District Council of Karoonda East Murray, District Council of Loxton Waikerie, Mid Murray Council, Renmark Paringa Council, Rural City of Murray Bridge, Southern Mallee District Council, Elected Members, Landscape Board MR, Regional Development Australia MR, PIRSA, SAROC, Aurora Meliora Consulting, HRM Consulting, LGA of SA, engaged consultants, ZEMC, Wellbeing SA (Preventive Health), SA Drought Hub, One Basin CRC, SA State Government Departments, MDA, MDBA, LGFA, Murray and Mallee Public Transport, First Nations and our vibrant, passionate, hard working and connected community. Thank you for your ongoing efforts to nurture the Murraylands and Riverland region to a :

Connected Region, Resilient Community, Economic Opportunity and Healthy Environment .

(AI) Parts of this report has been prepared with the assistance and use of ChatGPT.