



Julia Agostino
Committee Secretary
Regional Development and Decentralisation
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Ms Agostino

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the inquiry into Regional Development and Decentralisation.

The MDBA would like to share its recent experience in improving its regional presence through the establishment of regional engagement officers and office locations in regional areas. This initiative was driven by the MDBA's need to enhance its regional presence and strengthen connections with people and communities in the Murray-Darling Basin.

The MDBA is the government agency principally charged with the integrated, sustainable and responsible management of the Murray-Darling Basin (the Basin) water resources. The MDBA is jointly funded by the Commonwealth and five basin States and territories.

The MDBA works collaboratively with Commonwealth government agencies, Basin state governments, local governments, regional bodies, industry groups, landholders, environmental organisations, scientists, research organisations and Basin communities, including Aboriginal communities.

In mid to late 2016, the MDBA considered options to improve engagement with regional stakeholders in the Murray-Darling Basin. The options included the establishment of a Regional Engagement Officer (REO) network and a full/partial relocation of the MDBA's offices to suitable regional areas.

Location options were evaluated against key criteria; proximity to the key stakeholders and the river; availability of suitable office accommodation; access to communication and transport infrastructure and access to community services, for example schools and healthcare. Eight options were then explored and costed in detail.

Initially the MDBA established REOs. REOs are hosted by a cross section of different organisations – local government, natural resource management organisations and regional development agencies. REOs are located in Murray Bridge, St George/Dirranbandi, Bourke, Wentworth, Shepparton, Leeton and Albury-Wodonga communities.

The MDBA also chose to implement a partial relocation solution, retaining the Canberra office and establishing shared office arrangements in Toowoomba, Adelaide and Albury-Wodonga. The shared office arrangements are in existing regionally based Commonwealth and State Government offices. These offices will accommodate 10 per cent of MDBA staffing over the next 12 months through voluntary staff relocation or the relocation of positions as vacancies become available.

The partial relocation supported by the REO network represented the best balance of cost and benefits, offsetting the risks to the MDBA operations and the MDBA's stakeholders.

Key factors in the decision on location included: significant regional footprint with a permanent staffing presence across all basin jurisdictions, sufficient facilities and

infrastructure to support MDBA's operations and attract qualified staff, ability to leverage existing Commonwealth and State resources, cost effectiveness and minimal disruption to the MDBA's business.

The MDBA chose to implement the regionalisation strategy in phases with the engagement of the REOs in late 2016, followed by the establishment of regional offices from 1 July 2017. The regional arrangements have been well received by MDBA's stakeholders. The voluntary staff relocation process and the phased implementation have helped to alleviate staff concerns and reduce the potential disruption and cost to MDBA business.

If you require additional information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

General Manager, Corporate Services
15 September 2017