

# SADA UPDATE

## **Murray Darling Basin Plan**

Member update: Wellington Meeting with DEWNR 10 April 2017

Recently SADA organised a meeting with local Dairy Farmers and senior water executives of DEWNR at Wellington on the banks of Lake Alexandrina to discuss the Murray Darling Basin Plan and its impacts on the farmers in the area. Dairy farmers appreciated the full and frank nature of the discussion by Departmental Officials who were present.

It was agreed that the Murray Darling Basin Plan is a necessary tool to secure the future of the river, particularly downstream. As a shared and finite resource the Murray, like all river systems, will show weakness near the mouth first. There have been encouraging signs of recovery in the past couple of years and it was agreed that every effort should be made to keep the good results coming along and better communicate the gains made.

The purpose of the meeting was also to enable an honest exchange between the Department and local farmers. The four hour discussion covered topics regarding the recovery of 2,750 gigalitres, the sustainable diversion limit adjustment process, the 450 gigalitres to be obtained through efficiency measures that achieve a neutral or beneficial socio-economic outcomes and a number of related matters. Conversations covered the issues of the amount of water being passed over the barrages, risks to the system from upstream users, as well as the clarification of a number of areas of Government policies and their implications for the Coorong, the Lower Lakes and the Murray Mouth.

Farmers are encouraged to use the Environmental Land Management Allocations (ELMA) on their properties. Currently the uptake of the ELMA is below allocation but pleasingly is increasing. The River Murray Water Allocation Plan (WAP) is being considered by the Minister and we will seek to arrange a further meeting to provide information to members when it has been approved.

## **457 Visas to be abolished**

The federal government has announced that it will abolish the 457 visa scheme and it will be replaced by two new temporary skilled worker visas - a short and medium term program. Importantly, existing 457 visas holders will not be affected. There is a lot that we don't yet know however, we are working with the ADF to get clarity on the full implications for dairy businesses.

We do know that the short-term, two-year visa will have an optional two-year extension available before a visa-holder must leave the country to apply again and that the short-term visa program will offer no prospect of permanent residency. The number of occupations targeted under the scheme will be reduced by 200 compared to roughly 650 classifications included in the 457 visa program. These exclusions include deer and goat farming. A medium-term, four-year visa program will target higher skilled workers from 183 occupations and workers will be able to apply for permanent residency. The four-year visas will require a higher standard of English language skills.

All skilled worker visa applicants will need to pass criminal checks and two years work experience will be required for both visas.