

Media release



Murray Irrigation

Monday 17 August 2015

Murray Irrigation restructure

Murray Irrigation Chief Executive Officer Michael Renehan is currently undertaking a comprehensive review of Murray Irrigation's strategy and organisation as he works towards presenting a vision for the future at the November Annual General Meeting.

"As I work towards developing a strategy for the company that will set us up for the next five years and beyond, I am taking steps to transition the company as a balanced, customer focussed workforce," Mr Renehan said.

"Part of this work includes looking at the organisational structure of the company and rebalancing the workforce and management roles.

"As part of this reorganisation, the roles of Executive Manager Customer and External Relations, Executive Manager Infrastructure and Executive Manager Finance have become redundant.

"As such, Jenny McLeod, Nick Ritchie and Oliver Kietzmann have accepted redundancies and will be finishing with Murray Irrigation.

"All three have made significant contributions to the company, particularly over the last 12 months that has seen the company undergo significant change.

"I will continue to work with the Board and to seek customer input as I develop a robust strategy that will position the company to deal with the current financial challenges and the ever present nature of variable water availability," Mr Renehan said.

The company strategy will be developed over the coming months to be presented to shareholders at the Annual General Meeting to be held in November.

Jennifer McLeod

For over 20 years, Jennifer (Jenny) McLeod has been committed to ensuring the interests of Murray Irrigation and its customers have been heard by those working on implementing water reform.

At the end of the month Mrs McLeod will leave Murray Irrigation following a corporate restructure. She leaves behind a proud legacy which has cemented Murray Irrigation's reputation as an effective force in the water policy space.

In reflecting on her career, Mrs McLeod said there have been many challenges, the most significant of which was working through the Millennium Drought and the water suspension.

"Managing the irrigation program through the period of suspended water and having to negotiate pulses to deliver anything through the system was tough and I hope this region never has to face something like that again," she said.

There have also been challenges that, through effective advocacy and negotiations, have led to better outcomes for irrigators.

"Working with the industry, we secured water as a property right. This was significant as before that the Government could do what they wanted (compulsory acquisition) with no compensation," Mrs McLeod said.

"Another highlight was successfully arguing the case for the large customer rebate for State Water charges which effectively reduces the Government charges paid by our customers."

Mrs McLeod was the Murray Catchment representative on the community reference committee during the drafting of the first Water Sharing Plan for the region.

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“Having been there on that committee, I know what the intent of the Water Sharing Plan was and every amendment that I become aware of, I balance against my knowledge to ensure that the original intent is maintained.”

That was just one of many firsts that Mrs McLeod was involved with. She was part of an industry team that negotiated the Snowy Hydro Required Annual Release (RAR) when the organisation was corporatised.

“The bureaucrats wanted the Murray RAR to be just 800GL per year but we knew this would be an issue so we got consultants on board and we fought to get the RAR back up to 1,062GL.”

She was also involved in developing the first private wetland watering program, getting environmental water delivered through Murray Irrigation infrastructure to wetlands throughout the region.

Mrs McLeod started work with Murray Irrigation at the time of privatisation in 1995 as a policy advisor and the Executive Officer for Southern Riverina Irrigators.

“It was a different time then,” she reflected. “So much has happened in water over the last 20 years and I am proud of the contribution I have made to the industry and the Murray Irrigation business.”

When asked what she felt her single biggest achievement has been she said building the strong relationship with regulating authorities and ensuring Murray Irrigation has a reputation of being an effective collaborator while always representing the interests of the business and customers.

“And working with, mentoring and developing my staff over the years,” she said. “I have worked with some great people and I am proud of all of them.”

Murray Irrigation Chairman Bruce Simpson commended the commitment Mrs McLeod has made for the Company over the years, particularly the past 12 months.

“The last year has been tough with the changes we have faced, the interim CEO, recruiting the new CEO and still making sure the Company achieved its targets and obligations,” he said.

“Jenny has been the mainstay that has ensured we met all of our regulatory obligations and delivered consistency for our customers during this period.

“She has always displayed the utmost professionalism and provided successive Boards with sound advice over many years,” he said

Murray Irrigation Chief Executive Officer, Michael Renehan said the knowledge and experience Mrs McLeod has is unique.

“There is no doubt that Jenny McLeod has played a significant role in water policy and water reform for over two decades,” he said.

“Her professionalism and knowledge is widely respected throughout the industry at both a State and Federal level.

“All of us at Murray Irrigation thank Jenny for her long-term commitment to the Company and the region and wish her the best in her future endeavours,” Mr Renehan said.

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Nick Ritchie

Planning to modernise Australia's largest private irrigation network in the midst of a water availability crisis was the biggest challenge faced by engineer Nick Ritchie during his seven years working at Murray Irrigation.

Mr Ritchie joined Murray Irrigation in 2008 and was integral to designing the private irrigation infrastructure operators' program (PIIOP) application for Murray Irrigation that was subsequently awarded funding.

"We took the learnings from the drought and were able to develop a solid PIIOP application that was ultimately successful," Mr Ritchie said.

"Modernisation of the system is a once in a century change that is going to drive improved economics for the whole area through on-farm productivity.

"Being an integral part of designing the project and then managing the rollout for a time has certainly been a highlight for me.

"There are many more challenges ahead for the company, but I believe a solid foundation has been laid during the period that I've been here," Mr Ritchie said.

Murray Irrigation Chairman Bruce Simpson said Mr Ritchie was pivotal in designing a modern and compliant irrigation system fit for the future.

He thanked Mr Ritchie for his service and commitment to the company and wished him and his family well for the future.

Mr Ritchie will leave Murray Irrigation at the end of the month.

Ends.

Contact: Perin Davey, Water Policy and Communications: T. 03 5898 3347