

## Communities and The Living Murray

*The Living Murray was established in 2002 in response to evidence that the health of the River Murray system is in decline. The Living Murray's first stage focuses on improving the environment at six 'icon sites' along the River.*

The sites were chosen for their high ecological value—most are listed as internationally significant wetlands under the Ramsar<sup>1</sup> convention—and also their cultural significance to Indigenous people and the broader community.

All Australians have an interest in the River Murray and the Murray-Darling Basin (the Basin). In addition to its environmental values, the water is used for drinking, watering gardens and factory production, while farmers use it for irrigating crops and pastures. People across Australia rely on these products for their day-to-day needs, while other products are exported.

A key part of The Living Murray is to find a balance between social, cultural and environmental needs, as well as national interests, to ensure there is fairness and equity in how the water is used.

It is essential for those communities and individuals likely to be most affected to participate directly in The Living Murray's implementation. It is important to involve those who may not normally have a chance to contribute their knowledge, values and aspirations.

The Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council recognised the need for community involvement in the management of the Basin and formed the Community Advisory Committee in 1986. This Committee provides advice to the Ministerial Council on natural resource management issues and community views in the Basin.

A Community Reference Group was established to provide advice on all aspects of The Living Murray's implementation. The group reports to the Community Advisory Committee, which considers this advice and then communicates it to The Living Murray Committee, the Murray-Darling Basin Commission (MDBC) and Ministerial Council.



Community reference group members at Lock 9, near Mildura. Photo: Italo Vardaro

### Community Reference Group

The Living Murray Community Reference Group fulfils its role by:

- receiving briefings on all aspects of The Living Murray
- seeking out the views of a wide range of interested parties within affected communities
- providing advice on the *River Murray Channel Environmental Management Plan*
- providing advice on *The Living Murray Environmental Watering Plan*.

The Group meets three times a year, and comprises 35 members who represent a range of interests and regions relating to the River Murray. The current members are:

Myles Treseder, Chair (Woorinen, Victoria)

#### New South Wales

Laurie Arthur (Moulamein), Gordon Ball, Bill Hetherington and Steven Ross (Deniliquin), Kelvin Baxter (Berrigan), Robert Black (Coleambally), Merrill Boyd (Berrigan), Steve Cooper (Albury), Howard Jones (Dareton), Kevin McKinnon (Tocumwal), Doug McWilliam and Dick Thompson (Griffith), Phyllis Miller (Forbes), Col Thompson (Sydney) and Judi Lawler (Moama).

#### Queensland

Leith Bouilly and John Grabbe (Diranbandi), Sarah Moles (Allora).

#### Victoria

Arlene Buchan, Tricia Caswell and Paul Sinclair (Melbourne), Barrie MacMillan (Mildura), Anne McCamish (Shepparton) and Russell Pell (Kyabram).

#### South Australia

Henry Jones (Clayton), Paul Martin (Renmark), Kerri Muller (Strathalbyn), Jack Papageorgiou (Cooltong), Jeff Parish (Barmera), Joanne Pfeiffer (Murray Bridge), Matt Rigney (Meningie) and David Wotton (Stirling).

### Local decisions about local icons

A management plan for each of the six sites is developed annually, outlining the environmental goals for each site. They also outline the volume and timing of environmental water and structural works needed to achieve those goals.

The consultation process for developing these plans involves the input of regional and local groups who have an interest or role in management of the icon sites. These local groups are coordinated by the relevant state agencies or catchment management authorities.

### Indigenous partnerships

An Indigenous Partnerships Project was established in February 2006. This project recognises Indigenous people's spiritual and cultural connection to their country, and their aspirations to be actively involved in managing the environment. This project works to ensure that Indigenous input is provided into each of the icon site environmental management plans. Indigenous Working Groups will ensure that Indigenous involvement is undertaken in culturally appropriate ways.

Local Indigenous facilitators are employed to work with their communities to produce use and occupancy maps for each icon site. These maps identify and record the spiritual, cultural, environmental, social and economic interests of Indigenous people for each icon site. The maps can also be used to direct cultural heritage protection and management, and help monitor the impacts of The Living Murray. Use and occupancy mapping is sometimes referred to as the 'geography of oral tradition'.

The Living Murray Indigenous Partnerships Project has been developed with support and input from the Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations.

### Future river managers

The MDBC supports a range of environmental education activities that promote young people teaching other youths. These include regional conferences and one-day workshops held at various locations throughout the Basin. Recent regional conferences have been held at Broken Hill, Toowoomba, Narrabri and Wagga Wagga. In 2006, conferences were held in Canberra and Bendigo.



Hands-on learning at Gunbower Forest.

Photo: Sandra Volk

The MDBC is also working in partnership with the Murray Darling Association to facilitate a series of youth forums along the River that are focused on The Living Murray. These forums help us learn from young people about the value they place on their local environment. It also enables them to understand more about The Living Murray program.

Recent forums held at Cohuna, Swan Hill and Corowa enabled students to propose solutions for improving the health of their stretch of the River Murray. Ideas included seeking farmer advice on improving irrigation plans, placing more snags (fallen trees and branches) in the River to provide habitat for fish, adding finer filters to pollutant traps and holding local environment days.

### Other fact sheets in this series

- Our unique icon sites
- Protecting and improving the icon sites
- Market-based water recovery
- Infrastructure improvements to recover water
- Construction and other activities
- Local government and The Living Murray.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ramsar* is an international treaty that focuses on the conservation of internationally important wetlands. The convention was signed in 1971 at a meeting in the town of Ramsar, in Iran.



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