

MLDRIN News

Quarterly news update from
the Murray Lower Darling
Rivers Indigenous Nations

Spring, 2015



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International Rivers Symposium

MLDRIN put forward the case for Aboriginal people's water rights at the 2015 International Rivers Symposium, in Brisbane this September. The theme of this year's River Symposium was 'healthy rivers – healthy economies'. MLDRIN Chair Darren Perry (pictured) presented on the need for 'restorative justice'; providing water entitlements for Aboriginal community and economic development. Attending forums like the River Symposium ensures that Aboriginal voices are part of the international discussion on water management.

Ngarrindjeri takes home the RiverPrize

The Australian RiverPrize is a prestigious environmental award that recognizes those who have developed and implemented outstanding, visionary and sustainable programs in river management. The 2015 award went to the Ngarrindjeri Regional Authority for their work, in collaboration with the South Australian Government, to protect the lower Murray River. Congratulations to all involved!

<http://goo.gl/fxMWPO>



Read our Annual Report!

If you'd like to know more about what MLDRIN has been doing in 2014/15 you can read our latest Annual Report online. Just visit the link below:

<http://goo.gl/IOoycl>



Ringbalin: healing the river

Murra Murra (QLD) to Goolwa (SA) 16-27th September

Ringbalin is a unique ceremony that travels the length of the Darling and Lower Murray Rivers to share culture and heal the spirit of the River. In September 2015, the Talkinjeri Dancers, led by Ngarrindjeri Elder Uncle Moogie, travelled from Murra Murra Station, on Kooma Country in QLD right down to the mouth of the Murray at Goolwa in SA.

Each day, the group met with local Traditional Owners to share culture and talk about the issue facing their river country. Every

night, a ceremony involving traditional music, dancing and stories was held. The aim of the tour is to unite First Peoples across the Murray Darling Basin and to heal the river through strengthening the culture and stories of its traditional custodians.

A highlight of the tour was a spectacular closing ceremony and exhibition held at Goolwa. A big crowd gathered to see the dance performance as well as short films produced during the journey. The

event coincided with World Rivers Day and a huge full moon added to the atmosphere.

MLDRIN helped to promote Ringbalin through our networks and social media. There are plans to make Ringbalin bigger and better. Uncle Moogie has extended an open invitation to all interested people to join the trip next year. Ringbalin is a powerful expression of First Nations connection and ongoing care for the Murray Darling Basin. For updates visit

facebook.com.au/mldrin

MDBA Chair visits Wiradjuri Country

Wiradjuri Elder, and MLDRIN Director, Aunty Coral Peckham led a tour of Wiradjuri country with Murray Darling Basin Authority Chair, Neil Andrew this October. The four-hour tour included visits to significant sites and discussions about how to sustain and enhance cultural values and the health of the Macquarie River. The group visited Troy Reserve, Terramungamine Reserve and the Jinchilla property,

all near Dubbo NSW. The tour was an important opportunity for Wiradjuri Traditional Owners to outline their aspirations for preserving and improving cultural values in the area, and developing sustainable business opportunities. MLDRIN has a role to play raising awareness of First Nations' rights and interests across the Basin. Meeting and talking on Country is a great way for decision makers to connect with community.



What have we been up to?

MLDRIN delegates and staff have been out and about engaging with key partners and working on country across the Southern Murray Darling Basin.



MLDRIN presents to Senate buy-back committee

In August, MLDRIN Chair, Darren Perry presented to the Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications to highlight Traditional Owners' concerns about a bill to cap water buy-backs for the environment. MLDRIN has outlined potential impacts arising from the Bill, which would prioritize expensive infrastructure upgrades over direct buy-backs to meet water recovery targets. The Bill passed with the support of the ALP in September. You can read MLDRIN's submission on the Bill here: <http://goo.gl/dM3bPP>

Submission to Murray-Darling Basin Plan Inquiry

MLDRIN has provided a detailed submission to the current Senate Standing Select Committee into the Murray-Darling Basin Plan. The Committee will look into the social and economic impacts of the Plan's implementation. Irrigators in Queensland, Victoria and NSW have called for the Basin Plan to be 'paused' and

questioned the value of Basin Plan environmental watering. MLDRIN's submission highlights the need for a robust plan, with targets to deliver adequate water to culturally significant wetlands and waterways. It also highlights the positive outcomes arising from partnerships between Traditional Owners and water management agencies.

A key issue is that the Basin Plan does not address the underlying inequality of a water allocation framework that is based on the dispossession of Aboriginal people from their Traditional lands and waters. Our submission highlights the need for restorative allocations to address ongoing barriers to entry for Aboriginal people in the water market.

You can view MLDRIN's submission online at: <http://goo.gl/lbIA14>. The Committee will be undertaking hearings until mid December and will report its findings by February 2016. Submissions are still being accepted and we encourage all Aboriginal people in the Basin to make their views known to the Committee. For more information visit: <http://goo.gl/3E7GQg>

Fish Biology Conference

In October, two MLDRIN delegates attended the Australian Society for Fish Biology (ASFB) conference in Sydney. This year's conference featured a special forum on native fish in the Murray Darling Basin. Wiradjuri Delegates Coral Peckham and Wayne Carr attended.

Paul Lumley Visit

In October, MLDRIN Directors Darren Perry and Grant Rigney hosted a visit from Paul Lumley, Executive Director of the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (CRITFC). CRITFC coordinates management policy and provides fisheries technical services for the Yakama, Warm Springs, Umatilla, and Nez Perce tribes in the North-West United States. As an inter-tribal organization, there are some interesting similarities with MLDRIN. The tour visited Mulcra Island on Ngintait Country, where attendees discussed opportunities for revitalizing traditional management and harvesting of native fish. They also visited cultural sites including the huge scar tree pictured below.

Continued

For more info on CRITFC visit:
www.critfc.org



The Basin by numbers

In September, MLDRIN Chair Darren Perry presented at the 'Basin by numbers' conference, a multidisciplinary symposium looking into the science of the Basin Plan and the socio-economics, and community impact of the multi-billion dollar

Australian Government Water for the Future package, as it pertains to the Basin. Darren highlighted the need for integrating Aboriginal water rights and aspirations into Basin management. The conference was attended by experts in water management, economic and public policy and organized by the Goyder Institute and the Centre for Water Economics, Environment and Policy, at Crawford School of Public Policy, at The Australian National University.

States Water Resource Plan Meeting

In late October, delegates from MLDRIN and the Northern Basin Aboriginal Nations (NBAN) attended a meeting (*below*) with representatives from the Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA), the Basin States and the ACT Government to discuss roles and responsibilities in water resource planning. The meeting was an opportunity for all stakeholders to put forward their perspective on

how requirements for Indigenous engagement in water resource planning should be undertaken. The MDBA put forward an important 'Position Statement' detailing how they will assess the State's performance against requirements included in the Basin Plan. MLDRIN is working to ensure that Traditional Owners in the Basin are well informed about how they can maximize outcomes from engaging in water resource planning. You can view our report on water resource plans here: <http://goo.gl/pjnU8r>



Barapa Barapa Landcare Award

In September, a partnership project between the North Central CMA and Barapa Barapa Traditional Owners won the prestigious 2015 Victorian Landcare Award's Indigenous Land Corporation Land Management Award.

The Barapa Water for Country project is centred around Barapa Culture Team members identifying, mapping and recording the cultural values of the Lower Gunbower Forest to improve the management of environmental water.

The project is an excellent example of the positive outcomes arising from partnerships between water management agencies and Traditional Owners. Congratulations Barapa Barapa!



Senate Hearings

The Senate Select Committee into the Murray Darling Basin Plan will be holding public hearings in South Australia in early December. Hearings will be held on the 8th December in Goolwa and 9th December in Renmark. Local Traditional Owners are strongly encouraged to attend the hearings, to ask questions and make their views known to the Committee. For more information, feel free to contact MLDRIN on 0404 163 700 or email info@mldr.org.au



Water Resource Plans Report

MLDRIN has produced a report on Indigenous engagement in water resource plans, in collaboration with Environment Justice Australia.

It's a useful resource for Traditional Owners and water planners. You can read the report here:

<http://goo.gl/pjnU8r>



Gamilaraay unite to resist CSG

The Gamilaraay people of North West NSW are raising funds to conduct cultural workshops and defend their homelands against coal mining and Coal Seam Gas (CSG). The site of the proposed new Shenhua Coal mine is located on Gamilaraay country and there are big concerns about the impact on water and cultural values. Support the fundraising effort by donating here:

<https://goo.gl/IDveho>

Shake up in the water world

With the appointment of Nationals MP Barnaby Joyce as Minister for Water in September and the ongoing Senate Select Committee into the Basin Plan, water has again heated up as a major political issue. So, what does this mean for First Nations in the Basin? Are Traditional Owner's voices being heard in the increasingly vocal debate?

Under Malcolm Turnbull, responsibility for water has been moved from the Department of Environment, into the Agriculture portfolio. Turnbull claimed in September that "the ones that understand the water and the country better than anyone are Australia's farmers." This sadly ignores Aboriginal people's long connection with the environment of the Murray Darling Basin. There is concern among environment groups that farmers and irrigators will be allowed to influence policy and undermine much needed reforms. Barnaby Joyce has highlighted that "water is wealth", suggesting that socio-economic issues will be prioritized over environmental and cultural values.

However, the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder (CEWH) has been retained in the Department of Environment. The CEWH is responsible for overseeing the management of the Australian Governments environmental water holdings. Under Basin Plan rules, environmental watering must be planned having regard to Indigenous values and uses.

While the Nationals have control of the water portfolio, South Australian Liberal Senator Anne Ruston has been appointed 'Assistant Minister'. It appears likely that she will play a

significant role in the ongoing implementation of the Basin Plan. As a South Australian, Senator Ruston may be more sensitive to concerns about the impact of upstream irrigation on the Murray.

A growing push from both the Nationals and a number of cross-bench Senators to 'pause' the Basin Plan could negatively impact on Country, if the delivery of environmental water to key assets in the Basin is compromised. Cultural sites and values that rely on adequate watering are heavily reliant on successful implementation of the Basin Plan.

All politicians also need to understand that the Basin Plan does not address the underlying inequality of a water entitlement framework based on the dispossession of Aboriginal people from ownership of land and natural resources.

MLDRIN has sought meetings with both Barnaby Joyce and Senator Ann Ruston to discuss these issues. It is vital that First Nations' voices are heard in the debate about water in Australia. MLDRIN will be working to raise the profile of Aboriginal rights and interests. Member Nations are also encouraged to write to their local MPs and Senators to communicate their concerns and aspirations around water management.



Help MLDRIN speak as a strong, united voice for Sovereign First Nations

Since 1998 MLDRIN has worked to ensure that the voices of Sovereign First Nations from the Southern Murray Darling Basin are heard loud and clear. We need your support to hold Governments to account and achieve big wins for our people. Eligible First Nations who do not currently have Delegates attending MLDRIN meetings are warmly invited to apply. Please email executiveofficer.mldrin@gmail.com for more info

"The land, water, air and people recognised as one holistic landscape, protected and sustained by our sovereign peoples"



Maraura

Waywurru

Tatti Tatti

Barapa Barapa

Taungurung

Barkindji

Wamba Wamba

Nari Nari

Wadi Wadi

Wegi Wegi

Yita Yita

Yorta Yorta

Ngarrindjeri

Nyeri Nyeri

Mutthi Mutthi

Dja Dja Wurrung

Wiradjuri

Ngintait

Latji Latji

Wergaia

Wolgalu

Dhuduroa

Yaitmathang

Wotjabaluk