

MLDRIN News

Quarterly news update from
the Murray Lower Darling
Rivers Indigenous Nations

Autumn, 2016



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Are our rivers in crisis?

This summer and autumn, Traditional Owners across the Southern Murray-Darling Basin have been confronted by a serious outbreak of toxic blue-green algae. We've also seen the Darling River reduced to a string of degraded waterholes, with communities, fish and wildlife suffering the consequences. MLDRIN hears many concerns from Aboriginal people in the Basin about the impacts of low flows and degraded water quality on cultural values, wellbeing and public health. So, are these 'natural' phenomena? What is behind the worrying state of our rivers and what are the impacts on community, country and culture?

Blue-green algae

There has been an extensive outbreak of blue-green algae in the lower Murray, stretching from Hume Dam almost to South Australia. Blue-green algae are actually a type of bacteria known as cyanobacteria that draw their energy from sunlight. With the right conditions, the bacteria develop into a 'bloom' causing a range of public health risks. The cyanobacteria produce toxins that, when ingested, can cause liver damage, stomach upsets and nervous system disorders. *CONT. p.5*



Stay up to date with MLDRIN

MLDRIN regularly posts updates about important events and deadlines on our facebook page: www.facebook.com/mldrin as well as our website mldrin.org.au. If you'd like to stay up to date, please 'like' the facebook page. You can also hit the 'sign up' button on our facebook page and we'll add you to our newsletter mailing list!



'Towards Cultural Flows'

Glenelg River Aboriginal Water Values Scoping Project

There are many exciting projects and partnerships focused on Aboriginal water management taking off! The Glenelg River is a waterway of great significance to Traditional Owners (TOs) in South Western Victoria. TOs have expressed their rights and aspirations to manage water in the Glenelg. Now a partnership between the Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners, Barengi Gadjin Land Council and the Glenelg Hopkins CMA will investigate Traditional Owner values and uses for the Glenelg

River. The 'Towards Cultural Flows' project will enable the integration of Aboriginal values and traditional knowledge into environmental water planning and delivery. It will also ensure that TOs have opportunities to develop their knowledge and capacity to participate in water management in South West Victoria. Importantly, the project will be a starting point to identify longer-term cultural flow interests in the Glenelg River system.

While it is not part of the Murray-

Darling Basin, MLDRIN is keen to support the aspirations of TOs along the Glenelg to progress their cultural flow objectives. The project will also contribute to improved policy and management practices, in line with the development of an Aboriginal Water Framework in Victoria.

The concept of Cultural Flows, formalized in the Echuca Declaration (2007) is an important tool to open discussions about Aboriginal water rights. For info <http://www.ghcma.vic.gov.au/cultural-heritage/>

MLDRIN/NBAN Joint Meeting

We're excited to announce that there will be a joint gathering of MLDRIN and NBAN in Canberra this year! Representatives from over 40 Sovereign First Nations will gather to discuss issues of water management and Indigenous rights at a critical point in the implementation of the Basin Plan.

This meeting will be a crucial opportunity to build a united voice

on Indigenous water rights in the Basin. MLDRIN wishes to recognise the support of the MDBA in providing funding for this important gathering.

MLDRIN and NBAN invite State and Commonwealth agencies, researchers and other interested parties to make contact regarding participation in the gathering. Contact info@mldrin.org.au

Stay tuned for more details very soon!



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.

Gathering at Mansfield

MLDRIN held a full gathering at Mansfield (VIC) on Taungurung Country this March. Delegates from across the Southern Basin discussed issues ranging from the blue-green algal bloom, water resource planning and cultural flows. Delegates were joined by representatives from the Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA), Victorian Government, Mallee and North Central CMAs, Parks Vic as well as independent researchers. Some highlights of the meeting included the attendance of a new Taungurung delegate and special sessions for women's and men's business. See page 2 (above) for details of our upcoming joint meeting with the Northern Basin Aboriginal Nations (NBAN).

Aboriginal watering priorities

MLDRIN has been working to develop a process to ensure that Traditional Owners' values are incorporated into planning for environmental water management. Each year the MDBA publishes Environmental Watering Priorities, which guide the way water is delivered across the Basin. The Priorities need to have regard to Indigenous values and uses. At the recent Mansfield full gathering, MLDRIN members trialed a new

questionnaire to identify the places, plants and animals that are most in need of water. Information gathered from the questionnaire and other tools, can be used to inform the annual priorities. MLDRIN also prepared text to contribute to the annual environmental 'outlook' booklet. MLDRIN will continue to adapt and improve this process to make sure TOs have a say in water management. You can view the outlook booklet online at: <http://goo.gl/nl6rYC>

SA Nations Meeting

In April, MLDRIN delegates including Darren Perry and Kingsley Abdullah participated in a First Nations meeting to discuss water resource planning in South Australia. The SA Department of Environmental Water and Natural Resources (DEWNR) coordinated the meeting to bring together TOs from across the SA Murray Darling Basin, and adjacent Nations in Victoria and NSW. Attendees highlighted the need for adequate resourcing and dedicated Aboriginal staff, to undertake engagement in the Basin. There was also strong support for the idea of a Basin-wide Aboriginal Water Summit to bring together ideas and develop a coordinated approach.

First Peoples AWA

In April, MLDRIN delegates and staff took part in field-work with the First Peoples of the River Murray and Mallee (First Peoples). First Peoples are conducting an Aboriginal Waterways Assessment (AWA) on country around Berri and Renmark, SA. The field-work in April involved visits to a couple of sites in the Chowilla floodplain where participants yarned and discussed the importance of sites in the area. AWA assessment forms were filled out and the details are condensed into a report, which will be held by the First Peoples and used to influence water planning in the area. MLDRIN is looking forward to fulfilling a more active role of in the future application of the AWA. *Picture at top left of this page shows First Peoples members completing assessment forms at Chowilla.*

Victoria's Water Plan

The Victorian Government has released a discussion paper for a new water plan for the State. The draft plan includes a dedicated chapter on 'Recognising and managing for Aboriginal values'. Key strategic directions covered in the plan include: the establishment of an Aboriginal Water Program, employing Aboriginal staff to...

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run field work and engage with local communities and support for Victorian Traditional Owners to enter the water market. MLDRIN has been closely involved with the development of the plan, as a member of the stakeholder reference committee. We strongly encourage all Victorian Aboriginal people to view the discussion paper and make a submission by 13 May 2016. This new plan is a big opportunity to influence the management of water in Victoria for the next decade. Please visit <http://haveyoursay.delwp.vic.gov.au/water-for-victoria> for info



E-water in NSW

In March, MLDRIN staff attended an Aboriginal Community Forum on management of the Millewa forest Icon Site, coordinated by NSW Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH). Representatives from Local Aboriginal Land Councils and the Yorta Yorta Nation discussed approaches to environmental water delivery, monitoring and other land management activities. Traditional Owners expressed strong aspirations to have an active role in the management of this important site.

Open day at Gunbower

On March 10th, MLDRIN delegates and staff took part in an open day in the Gunbower Forest (Nth Victoria). Barapa Barapa Traditional Owners are working with the North Central CMA to map cultural values in the forest and develop watering objectives. MLDRIN Barapa Barapa Delegate Neville Whyman (pictured right) explained the project and the significance of the forest to attendees from a range of organ-

isations including the Forestry Corporation of NSW, DELWP (VIC) and Parks Victoria.

Cultural Flows research

Fieldwork for the National Cultural Flows Research Project has kicked off! On the 27th March members of the Nari Nari Tribal Council, including MLDRIN Delegates Ian and Rene Woods, began working alongside contractors Rural Solutions at Toogimbie station. Toogimbie is one of the case study sites for the project. Initial field-work is focused on developing a methodology for the identification of cultural values and assessment of watering needs. For more info check out the Cultural Flows website: culturalflows.com.au



Victoria self-determination talks

In April and May, the Victorian Government will coordinate a series of meetings on self-determination, treaty and constitutional recognition with Victorian Traditional Owners. The forums will consider four key questions: What does successful self-determination look like? What are the fundamental principles for a treaty? What is the relationship between constitutional recognition and treaty? What should an Aboriginal representative structure look like?

MLDRIN strongly encourages all

Aboriginal people in Victoria to attend these meetings and make your voice heard! The forums kick off in Mildura on the 22nd April and finish with a two day meeting in Melbourne on the 26-27th May. <http://consult.aboriginalvictoria.vic.gov.au/Open-Meeting>



NSW AWI Workshops

The NSW Aboriginal Water Initiative (AWI) will hold Aboriginal Community Workshops in Dubbo and Wellington, as part of their engagement for the Macquarie Water Resource Plan. The workshops will allow Traditional Owners to receive updates on AWI work and start to influence the new water plans. Workshops will be held at the Dubbo LALC at 10am and the Wellington LALC at 1.30 pm, both on the 29th April. For more info contact Jason Wilson (AWI) on 0427926295 or you can email: jason.wilson@dpi.nsw.gov.au



Impact investment

National Geographic recently reported on a new approach to collaborative environmental watering. Last year, the Murray Darling Wetlands Working Group (WWG) became a partner in an Environmental Water Trust. The trust leverages financial investments to generate environmental outcomes, working with Traditional Owners in the Basin. Read more: <http://goo.gl/m8oVxW>



Ngarrindjeri water agreement

The Ngarrindjeri Regional Authority has signed a landmark, three-year agreement with the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder to manage water delivery in parts of the South Australian Murray. The partnership establishes a way to deliver environmental water which ensures environmental assets are being cared for in accordance to the cultural protocols of the Ngarrindjeri nation. This is hopefully just the first of many agreements!

More info:

<http://goo.gl/F0CIPI>

Blue Green Algae

Algal blooms can also have effects on livestock causing illness or occasional death and there is evidence that toxins from cyanobacteria can poison wildlife and domestic pets. Once blooms subside, decaying algae can reduce the oxygen levels in the water, creating a 'blackwater' event and damaging environments and the animals they support.

Algal blooms clearly impact on the cultural values and uses of waterways. At a recent MLDRIN meeting, delegates highlighted that these dangerous algal blooms are a way for Country to tell the global community that it is sick. Toxic algal blooms cause distress amongst communities and also stop people being able to fish, swim, drink and connect to wetlands and waterways. Being unable to use and enjoy the river contributes to disconnect Aboriginal people from Country and culture.

So what causes algal blooms and are they getting worse? Key factors include low flows, water extraction for irrigation, the regulation of rivers by weirs and dams, high temperatures and nutrient levels, stratification (different layers) of hot and cold water and low turbulence. While a 2011 study found that the amount of algal blooms has not changed much within the river system over the period between 1980 and 2008, the regulation of our inland river systems and higher temperatures, predicted by climate change modeling, mean we could face more frequent and damaging outbreaks.

What about the Darling?

The Barkindji people, Traditional Owners of the Darling River Country have expressed their concern and frustration at the state

of the river, which has stopped flowing downstream of Wilcannia. Water users of the lower Darling claim that over-allocation of hundreds of gigalitres of water to upstream irrigators has caused a 'man-made' disaster. But NSW DPI Water says that record low inflows are the main cause of the problem. According to DPI Water, summer rainfalls in the catchment have failed for the third year in a row, the first time that's happened in history.

Whatever the cause, the current state of the Darling points to major systemic problems that are not going away any time soon. A recent study released by the University of Melbourne suggests that climate change could result in more significant reductions in rainfall than previously estimated. Again, Traditional Owners and Aboriginal cultural traditions will bear the brunt of these changes. 'Barkindji' literally means 'River People'. The Darling (or Barka) is a source of cultural identity, not to mention of food, spiritual sustenance and materials for ceremonial and practical use. MLDRIN believes that Basin governments must take these risks into account as they plan for the future of our inland river systems.

As over-extraction, climate change and drought continue to impact on our rivers, Aboriginal ecological knowledge must be supported and respected for the lessons it can teach.





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"



MURRAY LOWER DARLING RIVERS Indigenous Nations

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