

Renmark to the Border
Local Action Planning Association

Community News

Summer 2007



Twilight at Chowilla, November 2007

Welcome to the last newsletter for 2007. To say it's been an interesting year is an understatement. The drought conditions we are currently experiencing are making it hard for everyone. Hopefully with the new year, conditions will improve.

International Volunteer Day celebrations were held on 5th of December. This was a great way to recognise all the hard work volunteers

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the community members, landholders and schools who have given their time over the previous year on such projects as wetland monitoring, revegetation and land and water groups. The time and effort put in is greatly appreciated.

Wishing everyone a happy and safe Christmas and New Years.

Mardi Miles
Project Manager



**RENMARK
TO THE
BORDER**
LOCAL ACTION PLANNING
ASSOCIATION INC.

Twilight at Chowilla

The urgent need for water for River Red Gums and other vegetation on the Chowilla Floodplain was the stark message received by Community members who attended the second Renmark to Border LAP group twilight tour of the Chowilla floodplain recently.

Like the rest of the Murray Darling Basin, the Chowilla Floodplain is suffering greatly from a lack of flooding flows. While the environment is adapted to drought cycles Chowilla has suffered a man-made drought for many years due to over extraction from the system resulting in the Chowilla floodplain receiving flooding flows on average one year in 12 instead of once every 2 to 3 years.

A range of community representatives heard about watering programs that occurred between 2004 and 2006 to water priority wetlands. Significant responses in tree health and associated benefits for wildlife such as the endangered Southern Bell Frog were achieved, but experts are concerned that approximately ten percent of trees previously watered will be lost if follow up watering cannot occur.

Chowilla is one of six Living Murray Icon Sites targeted to receive environmental water from the First Step of the Living Murray initiative. The Living Murray program was established in 2002 in response to evidence that the health of the River Murray system was in serious decline.

Participants heard that with the current drought and potential impacts on flows from issues such as climate change, the outlook for flooding flows in the near future is not good. In the absence of adequate environmental flows there is a need to intervene and avoid the loss of this important environmental asset to SA by adopting measures that make the most of lower flows for whole of floodplain benefits.

Brad Hollis from the SA Murray Darling Basin NRM Board detailed a proposal to construct an environmental regulator on Chowilla Creek. The regulator will enable the generation of floods over much of the floodplain at low flows.

“The regulator does not replace the need for us to recover natural environmental flows but until this is possible there is a need for intervention to prevent the loss of vast areas of the iconic Chowilla floodplain by making use of lower flows,” said Brad.

He explained that the regulator would only be operated for a few months on average every three years and that even when it is operated, flows through Chowilla Creek will be maintained. The regulator will provide for the passage of fish in a range of sizes, while comprehensive monitoring will enable adaptive management of the structure.



International River Health Conference



Members of the Upper Murray Youth Council traveled to Canberra in October to take part in the International River Health Conference. The theme of this conference was 'one life, one world, our future, and worked on the kids teaching kids principle. Delegates were not only from schools across the Murray Darling Basin, but from across the country and from overseas.

Of interest to the students were presentations from people such as Dan Adams (Make poverty history), Dr James Moody (ABC New Inventors and CSIRO), Michael Klim, and Billy and Aleisha from Big Brother. The conference also had a 'hands on' element, and activities included water sampling, mapping ecological footprints, and filming a television commercial to advertise sustainability.



The Upper Murray Youth Council gave a presentation at the conference, 'Big Brother in the Riverland'. Each member nominated issues which were affecting their time in the Riverland. Issues nominated included the drought, water restrictions, global warming, carp, feral animals and inefficient irrigation practices. Audience members were asked to nominate issues which were affecting their time in the wider Murray Darling Basin.



It was a great opportunity for the students involved to meet other students from different backgrounds experiencing different issues, who have a common goal of helping and learning more about the environment.

The Upper Murray Youth Council is open to all secondary school students from across the Riverland, and meets monthly during school terms. For further information, contact Rebecca Keynes, Catchment Care officer, SA Murray Darling NRM Board, or Mardi Miles, Renmark LAP.

Revegetation Program 2008

The Renmark LAP is now accepting expressions of interest for 'Revegetation Incentive Scheme 2008'. The scheme provides incentives to carry out revegetation works, or fencing works to approved projects.

All revegetation projects must aim to improve the health and biodiversity of the local environment.

If you would like to get involved in the revegetation program, or would like more information, contact the Renmark LAP on 8586 6633, or visit www.rivermurray.sa.gov.au/lapgroups/renmark to download an 'expression of interest' form.

Renmark LAP AGM

The Renmark LAP held a successful AGM on Friday 26th of October. Guest speaker for the AGM this year was chef Andrew Fielke. Andrew gave a talk on how he got to where he is today, and also put on a cooking demonstration using bush tucker.

Attendees were treated to such dishes as Ironed Barramundi with spring onion mash. The cooking method for this was quite unusual, with the fish cooked using an iron and ironing board!

The AGM reflected on the previous years projects, elected the Renmark LAP steering committee, and outlined projects for the coming year. The efforts of outgoing committee members Ses Venemas and John Kennedy were recognised.



2007 AGM Chairman's Report

Welcome to all valued community members, committee members and staff,

Firstly I would like to offer my sincerest apologies for not being able to be present tonight to the Tenth Renmark to the Border Local Action Planning Annual General Meeting, call it busy times and a dash of stress has brought an illness back to surface.

Anyhow on with the proceedings

Testing times... we all live in, regardless if you're the local hair dresser or the friendly baker down the road there isn't a soul that hasn't been somewhat effected by the extreme climatic conditions. But being humans by nature we have a tolerance to survive no matter what the disaster is or problems that face us. We strangely pull towards our neighbors, colleagues and friends to best face together the eventual solution. This is where I see the Renmark to the Border LAP has excelled this year, whether it be by distraction, consultation or engagement the RBLAP has pulled several community groups together and given them a common focus. This has been instrumental with keeping a positive focus in our own "backyards" and benefiting the outside community significantly. How do we measure this... it's not easy and there are many ways to do this but maybe one way is by looking around in the room and just acknowledging what it is each individual brings to this organisation. This is what makes our LAP ours, the people on the committee, here's to the next ten years

I would also like to thank the LAP committee enormously for the hours of voluntary work they share together each month, the bonded leadership and for the endless ideas that sometimes develop into environmental projects. The several sub committees that make Mardi's job so much easier and our extended LAP organisations, the case study groups for their tireless drive to better the region.

The Environmental Scholarship is up and running with some students already making the most of the opportunity, The Environmental Scholarship provides a monetary award to local students who wish to further their studies in the environmental/natural resources management fields. This is a fantastic example of how the LAP promotes and further helps the local community.

The RBLAP was successful in gaining a community grant worth \$265,000 through the SA MDB NRM Board which helped to fund the employment of full time staff and not to mention a few projects on-ground.

Looking retrospectively it has been a successful year in which you will read more about in the staff reports. But I would like to take some time to highlight, the implementation of the two land and water management plans including the Memorandum of Understanding for the Pike area, the recently held tours for the LAP staff and committee, SA MDB NRM board & group members to Calperum, Pike and

Lyrup. The only very recent case study tour to the north west of Victoria and south west NSW, but more of that in the staff reports.

We have had some very interesting guest speakers during the year at our LAP meetings, one that comes to mind is Anne Jensen who spoke about reforestation of Red Gum and Black Box trees along the Murray Corridor. What I found so fascinating is the amount of seed Anne managed to collect from these trees, these figures were well above expectation. Even in environmentally trying times these beautiful trees still have the energy to reproduce. Amazing.

Last but never forgotten, a big thank-you to the staff that have supported the LAP Committee this year. Chris Alderton who moved on earlier was marvellous to work with, Tahlee Norman for her contributing efforts. But the big thanks goes to Mardi, who has brought together this wonderful night and her drive and energy both whilst promoting our LAP and showcasing our projects is a true credit to us. Well done and I look forward to continuing to work together. Last but not least, our latest recruit Jayme Peltz who was recently employed at the SA MDB NRM board comes to us with a wealth of knowledge and will be a highly valued member to both of the case study committees, welcome.

Finally I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to Chair such a great community driven organisation and opening opportunities that only being involved in NRM can. Sadly I will not be standing for Chairperson for either the LAP committee or the EA committee, but pending the outcome from tonight I would like to become a committee member whilst staying on both of the sub committees I'm already on.

Stuart Martin
Out going Chairman RBLAP

(Copies of the Annual Report are available from the LAP.)

Carpet Python Recovery Project

A study examining the home range and habitat use of the Carpet Python is underway, part of the SAMDB Carpet Python recovery project. An experienced researcher from Victoria has recently visited, providing expertise to the local threatened species team in the Murraylands. Days and nights have been spent actively searching for pythons in three localities in the Riverland (Murtho Forest, SW Katarapko, and private land near Kingston-on-Murray). These areas were targeted because of nearby reports of Carpet Pythons from community members. These public sightings have been extremely valuable to the recovery project.



Two pythons have thus far been located by active searching methods. They are being housed temporarily until a tracking device (a radio-transmitter) can be surgically implanted by a local vet. One operation has already taken place at the Adelaide Zoo under the instruction of the zoo's senior vet. Once the pythons have been fitted with the transmitters, and have sufficiently recovered from the surgical procedure, they will be released at their exact point of capture. Thereafter they will be tracked at varying frequency (daily up to once per fortnight) through the landscape for up to 12 months. Radiotelemetry will provide valuable, detailed information on habitat utilisation, microhabitats and home range of the Carpet Python in the region, in turn helping with the next steps for recovery.



Community sightings are essential for helping us understand why Carpet Pythons are declining. Please keep reporting sightings to:

Claire Treilibs, Ph. 8595 2182, DEH Berri, treilibs.claire@saugov.sa.gov.au
Online sighting forms available at:
http://www.environment.sa.gov.au/biodiversity/murraylands_bcp/

Riverland LAPs Community Quiz Night

Do you know what the chemical symbol for salt is, or who won the first Melbourne cup? These were the sorts of questions that were asked at the recently held 'community quiz night' in Berri. The quiz night was hosted by the Riverland LAP's (Renmark to the Border, Berri Barmera, Loxton to Bookpurnong, and Riverland West), and the South Australian Murray Darling Basin Natural Resources Management Board. The aim of the quiz night, held in recognition of National Water Week, was to raise awareness of water saving measures, and to highlight the current condition of our local wetlands.



The event was a great success, with over 120 people attending. All attendees were in the running to receive a voucher for a new rain water tank. This was a highly sort after prize, and hopefully it will rain once the lucky recipient gets it put into place.

The event also received funding through Primary Industries and Resources SA 'Community support grants – drought response' program. This funding was greatly appreciated. Considering the huge success of the quiz night, it's likely it will become an annual event.



Environmental Education Award Now Open

The Renmark to the Border Local Action Planning Association's Environmental Education Award is now open and accepting applications. The Award was an idea developed by the steering committee to encourage local students to complete further study within the environmental field at a tertiary level (university, TAFE or other). It is hoped these students may decide to return to the Riverland and utilise their recently acquired skills within the NRM field.

The Environmental Education Award offers cash payment of \$1,500 per semester of study upon successful completion of each semester. The Award will be granted for a maximum of three years, and will be subject to annual review.

To be eligible, applicants must ordinarily resided with the Renmark LAP area. This means that students who have completed their secondary schooling in the area, or those who have moved to other areas to complete their schooling and their parents still live in the area, are both eligible.

Applications close on Friday 15th February 2008. For more information about the award, and how to apply, please contact the Renmark LAP.

Pike Implementation Plan (PIP)

The aim of the PIP project is to produce a Pike Implementation Plan that will provide an integrated package of works for the three priority areas of Salinity Management, Sustainable Irrigation and Floodplain Planning in the Pike River region. The Plan will be used as a business case for investment in the region.

A joint project for pike river sustainable water supply and floodplain planning was developed & tenders called. This was won by Australian Water Environments (AWE) who commenced work on the 17th October 2007.

The Joint Project Statement is as follows:

Pike River Sustainable Water Supply and Floodplain Planning Joint Project has two core elements,

- The production of a floodplain plan for the Pike River floodplain developed in line with the Draft Floodplain Planning Guidelines; and
- A recommendation for improved water delivery for the Pike River Irrigation area.

The inclusion of both elements in the Project Brief demonstrates the inextricable links between floodplain management, and water supply and delivery to irrigators in this stretch of the South Australia River Murray floodplain. Therefore the outcomes of these two main elements must be integrated and complimentary.

The project brief is available to view on the web site and will be completed at the end of June 2008. The outcomes of this joint project and the conceptual designs for the Salt Interception Scheme will feed into the Pike Implementation Plan.

A Governance Structure has been set up for the PIP project and you can view this on the web. There is a PIP Project Reference Committee that receives information from the Salinity Management Steering Committee, the Floodplain Steering Committee and the Water Management for Sustainable Irrigation Steering Committee. All these committees have representatives from the community on them and the PIP Coordinator works closely with the Renmark to the Border Local Action Planning Association and the Pike River Land Management Group and members of the community.

A successful community meeting was held 13/11/07 at the Lyrup Club and this meeting was called to provide an outline of the PIP process and the joint project brief.

A water budget workshop and a floodplain workshop have also been held during November 2007 and a summary and notes from these workshops can be viewed on the web site.

Members from the SA Murray Darling Basin Natural Resources Management Board (SA MDB NRM) and RBLAP were part of a tour of the Calperum and Pike area during October 2007. This information tour was hosted by Mardi Miles, Project Officer for RBLAP and Frances Simes, PIP Coordinator.

The PIP Coordinator was invited to attend the Aboriginal Riverland Natural Resource Management Group meeting and the outcome from this meeting is a recommendation to the December meeting of the PIP Reference Group requesting that this group to be the Aboriginal Steering Committee for the PIP process.

The Renmark to the Border Local Action Plan (RBLAP) has set up the Pike Implementation Plan (PIP) web page. This web page is being updated on a regular basis and you are encouraged to access this to find out where this project is up to. The web page address for the Pike Implementation Plan is: <http://www.rivermurray.sa.gov.au/lapgroups/renmark/PIP.htm>

If you would like further information on the PIP please visit the web site or contact the PIP Coordinator;

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If undeliverable, return to:
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What's Happening

International Volunteer Day 5th December

2008

World Wetlands Day 2nd February

Schools Clean up Day 29th February

Clean Up Australia Day 2nd March



Government
of South Australia

South Australian Murray Darling
Basin Natural Resources
Management Board

Department of Land, Water and
Biodiversity Conservation

Department of Environment and
Heritage

Department of Primary
Industries of South Australia



Australian Government