NEWSLETTER  Issue 1, July 2012

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Welcome

Welcome to the Murray-Darling Basin Futures Collaborative Research Network (MDBfutures). In this monthly Newsletter we will profile our people, highlight points of interest and let you know about coming events. This Newsletter is about keeping you informed, letting you know who to contact and what workshops / seminars are available to enable you to have a say.

Snapshot

Dr Leonie Pearson believes that reform in the MDB is a topical and important issue that is crying out for a new approach.

As a Senior Research Fellow working on the Integration and Synthesis project, Leonie is working hard to create a collaborative environment that includes researchers and stakeholders alike.

Workshop - The Importance of problem framing...

We began our workshop series in early June when MDBfutures Visiting Fellow, Dr Neil Byron presented 'The importance of 'problem framing' and the role of quality research'. The workshop was well attended by representatives from a UC, ANU, MDBA, NWC, ABARES, SEWPaC, DAFF, DCCEE, CSIRO and USQ. From the feedback all felt the workshop was well worth attending
from both an information point of view, and for the ability to connect with others committed to improving the MDB.

Dr Byron contends "that 'improving the environmental, social and economic conditions across the MDB, in a highly uncertain future' is not a technical or engineering problem. It is unlikely that any single 'ideal' solution can be externally devised and imposed on stakeholders."

**Workshop 2 - Integrating MDBfutures Models**

The second of our workshops, "**Integrating MDBfutures Models**", was presented by Dr Leonie Pearson and Professor David Choquenot. Across the MDBFutures there has been a call to co-ordinate data and models. This workshop addressed the call by providing a space for all projects to learn and identify how their project models link with others. The workshop talked across disciplines, projects, 'jargons', perspectives and was an excellent forum for refining mechanisms for integration across MDBfutures projects.

**Forum on Report on Lake Burley Griffin**

MDBfutures, along with , the Institute for Applied Ecology and the Faculty of Business, Government & Law - University of Canberra, co-hosted a forum on the recent Report by the ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment on the state of watercourses and catchments for Lake Burley Griffin.

The Forum included a Panel Discussion chaired by Professor David Choquenot, which included Peter Beutel (NCA), Daniel Walters (ACT EPA) and Julian Thompson (SE NSW EPA). Among the attendees of the Forum were representatives of ACT and Federal Government, University of Canberra, a number of Catchment Groups, Landcare, Greening Australia, National Capital Authority, Australian Sports Commission, members of the media as well as interested members of the public.

**Have Your Say**

If you have anything you want to share about MDBfutures related topics (such as our workshops, seminars or forums), or if you have come across interesting research you would like to share, please email us at mdbfutures@canberra.edu.au

**Snapshot: Dr Leonie Pearson**

Dr Leonie Pearson is a Senior Research FellowMDBfutures CRN, working on the Integration and Synthesis Project.

**What excites you about your work with MDBFutures?**

Reform in the MDB is a topical and important issue that is crying out for a new approach. The CRN is actively looking at new and innovative approaches to the issues within the MDB.
What is involved in your role within the CRN?
My role involves working WITH researchers and stakeholders in the CRN. Getting them working in a collaborative environment so that we can produce the BEST and most RELEVANT research for the MDB.

What has been your favourite part of the CRN so far?
Meeting all the passionate and interested researchers and policy people involved with the CRN

What were you doing before MDBfutures?
I was involved in setting up the first soil carbon market in Australia (Working for NSW DPI in Dubbo).

Did you know?
I’m just in the process of getting my motorcycle licence so I can ride my brand new 250 Vespa to work.

Want to connect?
Dr Leonie Pearson +61 2 6201 5148 or email: leonie.pearson@canberra.edu.au

Overview of Workshop 1: Importance of problem framing...

MDBfutures Workshop 1: "The importance of 'problem framing' and the role of quality research"

Dr Neil Byron reflected on the MDBA Plan in comparison with the Great Barrier Reef Rescue Plan. Both the GBR and MDB are environmental icons, of profound economic, social and cultural importance to Australia and internationally. The way governments have approached the tasks of preventing further environmental deterioration of natural ecosystems, while sustaining or enhancing the communities and economy in the affected region, are diametrically opposite.

His contention is that "improving the environmental, social and economic conditions across the MDB, in a highly uncertain future" is not a technical or engineering problem. It is unlikely that any single "ideal" solution can be externally devised and imposed on stakeholders. The MDB has been approached as finding a technical solution to an undefined and contested problem. Despite commissioning vast amounts or new research and syntheses of existing research, it still seems no closer to an acceptable, workable solution.

The GBR process focused on the processes, activities and actors causing serious threats to water quality in the catchments and hence to the reef. It sought to devise acceptable alternative land use practices for all the threats, in priority order, which had to deliver significantly better environmental outcomes (water quality, biodiversity, habitat) but also had to be socially and financially acceptable to the majority of landholders. This required getting representatives of major industries (sugar, beef, cotton, mining, tourism, etc) "inside the tent" together with local governments, regional NRM bodies, conservation NGOs and indigenous people, then constructively and respectfully thrashing through some very contested and controversial issues.

His next contention was that the framing of, and approach to, the problem determines the type of research required/expected from those who commission it. Both may be quite different from the type of research academics might otherwise choose to undertake. Doing research that is innovative, interesting and gains the respect of our academic peers is not incompatible with research that is useful, applied and actually delivers better outcomes in the real world. We need, and can have, both.

Biography – Dr Neil Byron

Dr Byron is an environmental economist and policy analyst who has just been appointed as a Visiting Fellow to MDBfutures and an Adjunct Professor at the University of Canberra.

He was the Commissioner responsible for environment, agriculture and natural resource management issues in the Productivity Commission from April 1998 to March 2010. Neil presided over ten public
inquiries and directed the Commission’s environmental economics program during that period. He was reappointed as a part-time Associate Commissioner to assist with the Commission's current inquiry into the regulatory and policy barriers to effective Adaptation to Climate Change.

Previous appointments were with:

- Australian National University, teaching resource/environmental economics and development economics
- UN Project in Dhaka, Bangladesh, as Chief Technical Adviser to the Planning Commission
- Graduate program in Environmental Management and Development at ANU, as founding Director; and
- Centre for International Forestry Research, based in Indonesia, as Assistant Director General.

Dr Byron has a BSc (with first class Honours) in Forestry from the ANU, an MA (Economics) and PhD (Resource Economics) from the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada. Nell is a graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors, a Director of Earthwatch Australia and a Member of the Independent Science Panel for the Great Barrier Reef.

Workshop 2: Integrating MDBfutures Models

MDBfutures Workshop 2: “Integrating MDBfutures models: finding out the what, where, how and who of our models”

Across the MDBfutures there has been a call to co-ordinate data and models. This workshop addresses the call by providing a space for all projects to learn and identify how their project models link with others. This workshop is NOT about changing your project, but about articulating areas of opportunity for answering cross project research questions and efficiencies in project requirements (e.g. data gathering, field work).

Currently models are being developed, updated, deployed and conceptualized within the separate MDBfutures projects. To start the discussion on how these models link between data, variables, issues, spatial application, insights and outputs – we need to know:

- What models are currently proposed within MDBfutures?
- Where are the models being deployed in time and space?
- How are the models being characterized?
- Who is involved in the model?

As this is an issue of linking project to project outputs, project leaders were encouraged to send at least one member from their project to attend the workshop.

Prior to the workshop participants were sent a set of questions to help them describe the models within their project.

Biography - Dr Leonie Pearson

Dr Leonie Pearson is Senior Research Fellow, Integration and Synthesis theme in the MDBfutures CRN and comes from a variety of roles in state government, academia, consulting and CSIRO. She is an ecological economist interested in applying integrative systems thinking to regional development problems. Her recent work has focused on measuring and understanding resilience and transformation for sustainable development. Her applied work in regional Australia has focused on holistic water catchment management of social-ecological systems with particular note to urban contexts. This work has provided some significant insights for regional areas on how to measure sustainability through their capital assets - social, built, human and natural. In addition, it has provided clear insight to policy makers on where and how to intervene to achieve regional sustainability in Australia.

Biography Professor David Choquenot

Professor David Choquenot is the new Director of Institute of Applied Ecology and comes from New Zealand where he was General Manager, Biological Systems at Landcare and held an appointment as
Professor of Ecology at the University of Auckland.

His research interests focus on vertebrates, particularly how trophic interactions between vertebrates and what they eat drives population dynamics and community structure. Most of his work in this area has been in the context of managing biodiversity and agricultural pests. He has a strong interest in empirical research and predictive modeling. David also has an impressive track record in the management of a large research organisation, delivering quality research outcomes and linkages across sectors.

David has prior association with the University of Canberra, completing a Master of Applied Science here before moving to the University of Sydney and his PhD. His appointment marks a change in the IAE, as he is the first external appointment to the Director role.

Overview of Forum on Lake Burley Griffin Report

MDBFutures, the Institute for Applied Ecology and the Faculty of Business, Government & Law University of Canberra presented a Forum following The Report by the ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and Environment on the state of watercourses and catchments for Lake Burley Griffin.

At the Forum the Report was explained and discussed by experts who contributed to the report, and by representatives of key agencies.

The terms of reference for the Commissioner’s investigation included:

1. possible improvements for managing water quality and the appropriateness of the current protocols for lake closures;
2. identifying the causes of lower water quality, including possible resource implications of addressing them;
3. jurisdictional implications for water quality management of the lake; and
4. the implication of these findings for the ACT’s other major recreational waterways, such as Lake Ginninderra and Lake Tuggeranong.

The Commissioner’s Report was tabled in the ACT Legislative Assembly in early May 2012. (Go to the Report)

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<td>The Science - Water Quality</td>
<td>Adjunct Professor Ian Lawrence, Sustainable Design, University of Canberra, Senior Research Fellow, CRC eWater</td>
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<td>Management - Placing a Value on Lake Burley Griffin</td>
<td>Adjunct Professor Ian Lawrence, Sustainable Design, University of Canberra, Senior Research Fellow, CRC eWater</td>
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<td>Panel Discussion</td>
<td>Chaired by Professor David Choquenot, Chair, Institute for Applied Ecology</td>
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<td>Peter Beutel, Asset Mgr, National Capital Authority</td>
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<td>Daniel Walters, Director, Environment Protection &amp; Water Regulation, ACT EPA</td>
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Julian Thompson, A/Manager – SE Region, 
NSW EPA

A representative of the Commonwealth Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities

Representatives of other key agencies and decision makers