NEWSLETTER  Issue 2, August 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 engage with us.

Staffing for the Murray-Darling Basin Futures Collaborative Research Network (MDBfutures) is nearly complete. This month we are pleased to welcome:

- Maheshwar Rao our new Research Fellow working on the External Shocks Project
- And our 3 new PhD students:
  - Michael Peat working on the Water Allocation Project
  - Dominic Peel working on the Healthier places, Healthier people project
  - Eric Hansnata working on the Migration project

Goodbye and Thanks

Tref bids a fond farewell to the Murray Mouth.

Professorial Fellow and freshwater ecologist Trefor Reynolds leaves us this week after a year at UC in the Institute for Applied Ecology. Tref, a
close friend and colleague of the late Richard Norris, agreed to step in to help as Richard became ill.

While here, Tref has been a driving force in the early implementation of MDBfutures. Tref was co-leader of the Environmental Watering theme and played a key role in shaping our direction and projects. He has been an enthusiastic, constructive and energetic contributor – we wish him well and thank him!

Tref returns to Nova Scotia to immerse himself in genteel semi-retirement, family and consulting – and will retain a connection with MDBfutures through Sue Nichol’s project 'Using an evidence-based approach in the optimization of water allocation decisions'.

Snapshot: Dr Sue Powell

Dr Sue Powell brings almost 20 years of experience working in the MDB on water related issues to MDBfutures. She also brings a wealth of determination and spirit which is highlighted by the fact that she will be representing Australia in the paralympics later this month.

No wonder her favourite saying for the moment is "Don't count the days, make the days count!"

Read a short profile on Dr Powell

Snapshot - Dr Peter O'Brien

Dr Peter O'Brien states that the importance of MDBfutures is its ability to build "research capacity to tackle a critical problem for Australia.

How we integrate the social, environmental and economic demands placed on the Basin directly affects more than 2 million people, the health of our rivers and wetlands and the source of 70% of our irrigated agriculture.

It is crucial that we take steps in the right direction, informed by the best research."

Read a short profile on Dr O'Brien

Workshop - Ideas and Tools for Integration in MDBfutures

This third workshop focused on discussing the ideas (theory) and tools (methods) for integrative research within MDBfutures and the MDB. It was co-hosted by MDBfutures and ANU and was led by; Prof. Steve Dovers (Fenner School), Prof. Gabriele Bammer (National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health) and Dr Leonie Pearson (MDBfutures synthesis project leader). This was an excellent opportunity to enhance collaborative links between ANU and MDBfutures as well as to learn and discuss how integration could be done and its benefits to MDBfutures and MDB.

Read an Overview of this Workshop

Workshop - Murray-Darling Basin: overview, issues, context

This half-day workshop provided MDBfutures researchers with an overview of the social, economic and environmental issues confronting the basin, from the perspective of experts and practitioners. It gave critical context to the multi-disciplinary research of the network.

This was a valuable opportunity for MDBfutures researchers to gain insights into the Murray-Darling Basin and to provide context for individuals' research project.
Did you know? What Have We Got Planned?

- Peter O'Brien, Director MDBfutures and Adrienne McKenzie, Program Manager of MDBfutures, will travel down to Albury and Leeton this month to meet researchers from Charles Sturt University (CSU) and the Murray-Darling Freshwater Research Centre (MDFRC) interested in collaborating with MDBfutures. They will also be taking the opportunity to meet with the Ricegrowers Association in Leeton.

- Recruitment Update:
  - 9 of the 11 Fellow positions have been filled
  - 5 PhD students have commenced and we anticipate recruiting more over the coming months

- MDBfutures is running a series of workshops on a wide variety of topics related to the Murray-Darling Basin and MDBfutures projects. Although not all of these workshops are open to non-project staff, we have provided slides from the workshops which are available for download. Please note that these slides are subject to copyright and may not be used without the express permission of the author(s). Look at slides available for download

Have Your Say

Thank you for the positive feedback from our 1st issue! We hope to make our Newsletter bigger and better with each issue, so remember if you have anything you want to share or articles you think would prove valuable to our readers please send them to us at mdbfutures@canberra.edu.au ....editor

Snapshot: Dr Sue Powell

Dr Sue Powell is a CRN Research Fellow working in the Institute for Applied Ecology

What excites you about your work with MDBfutures?
The opportunity to apply the skills and knowledge I’ve built up over the years to tackle the ongoing issues in the Murray Darling Basin in new and innovative ways.

What is involved in your role within the CRN / Project?
I bring almost 20 years of experience working in the MDB on water related issues so I see my role within the CRN project as that of an eco-hydrological modeller that can bring some reality to the academic problem of optimising water allocations between the environment and extractive users. This project brings together many collaborative partners so bringing all the parts together into a coherent integrative model is critical. However as a new PhD graduate, I also see my role somewhat like an apprentice with lots to learn about the world of a research academic. So I’m torn between being a ‘research fellow’ and a ‘post-doc’ but happy to answer to either.

What has been your favourite part of the CRN / Project so far?
Meeting and getting to know the team I work with.
**What were you doing before MDBfutures?**
For the last few years I have been completing my Masters and then PhD at ANU (Analysis and modelling of the flood pulse and vegetation productivity response in floodplain wetlands). Prior to that I spent almost ten years in the NW of NSW (based in Moree then Tamworth) dealing with regional water quality, river health and wetland issues and water reforms. I’ve also spent time working in groundwater quality assessments all over Australia, surface water quality assessment with ACTEW and even a stint in a genetic engineering and plant quarantine labs with CSIRO.

**Something surprising?**
At the moment I lead a double life as a Para-cyclist (cycling for athletes with a disability), representing Australia at numerous world championships and shortly off to the Paralympics in London. So right now my favourite quote is “Don’t count the days, make the days count”. (Muhammad Ali?)

What you might not know is that I did my first degree at Roseworthy Agricultural College in South Australia specialising in Wildlife Management and actually completed a couple of subjects at University of Canberra (or was it still CCAE back then??) to finish off that degree.

**Want to connect with Sue?**
Email her via sue.powell@canberra.edu.au or phone (02) 6201 5957

*Sue’s profile on the Australian Paralympic Website*

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**Snapshot: Dr Peter O’Brien**

Dr Peter O’Brien is Director and Professorial Fellow, Murray-Darling Basin Futures Collaborative Research Network.

**What excites you about your work with MDBfutures?**
Two things especially excite me in my role as Director of MDBfutures: ~ bringing together experts in the many disciplines – public policy, health, economics, ecology, planning and more – that we need to tackle the complex problems of the Murray-Darling Basin; and ~ building connections and relationships between government agencies wrestling with the challenges and academics whose ideas bring insights that can help

**Why is it important?**

MDBfutures is building research capacity to tackle a critical problem for Australia.

How we integrate the social, environmental and economic demands placed on the Basin directly affects more than 2 million people, the health of our rivers and wetlands and the source of 70% of our irrigated agriculture.

It is crucial that we take steps in the right direction, informed by the best research.

**Who is involved?**

Murray-Darling Basin Futures is based at the University of Canberra, bringing together the Institute for Applied Ecology, the National Centre for Economic Modelling, the Centre for Research and Action in Public Health, the Institute for Governance and the Faculty of Business, Government and Law.

UC is partnering with the Australian National University, the University of Southern Queensland and Charles Sturt University.

As well, we are working with 7 government partners – the Murray-Darling Basin Authority, the National Water Commission, the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Population and Communities, the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, the Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport, the Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency and CSIRO.

**What were you doing before MDBfutures?**
Before MDBfutures, I was Managing Director of the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation, and before that, Executive Director of the Bureau of Rural Sciences.
Something surprising?
I was born in Adelaide in 1956, a year of record inflows and flooding in the Murray-Darling Basin. Coincidence?

I am a keen fisherman, routinely out-fished by my 11 year old – the picture is of him about to release a substantial (Murrumbidgee) Murray Cod!

Want to connect?
Email: peter.o'brien@canberra.edu.au or Phone: (02) 6206 8792

Overview of Workshop 3: Ideas and Tools for Integration in MDBfutures

This third workshop focused on discussing the ideas (theory) and tools (methods) for integrative research within MDBfutures and the MDB. It was co-hosted by MDBfutures and ANU and led by: Prof. Steve Dovers (Fenner School); Prof. Gabriele Bammer (National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health); and Dr Leonie Pearson (MDBfutures synthesis project leader). This was an excellent opportunity to enhance collaborative links between ANU and MDBfutures as well as to learn and discuss how integration could be done and its benefits to MDBfutures and MDB.

What was this workshop about?

MDBfutures has been set up to work with stakeholders, participants, researchers and communities to improve research output and to better understand the MDB. To achieve this aim a specific investigative theme around integration and synthesis has been identified – but how is this theme to add value to MDBfutures and what are some possible ideas (theories) and tools (methods) for carrying out this work? This workshop discussed integration with particular insight to two questions:

- What are the best theoretical (ideas) and methodological (tools) approaches for integration of science to policy in MDB?
- Are these ideas and tools the same for integration between projects in MDBfutures?

Biographies

Professor Stephen Dovers

Stephen Dovers was originally trained as an ecologist and natural resource manager, and worked in local government and heritage management. Over time, he studied geography, environmental law and environmental history, and gained a PhD in environmental policy in 1996. He became an academic member of staff at the then Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies at the ANU in 1997. Since 2009, he has been Director of the Fenner School of Environment and Society at the ANU.

His research focus is on generic policy and institutional dimensions in environment and sustainability, combining contemporary and historical perspectives, across a diverse range of sectors and issues including climate adaptation, biodiversity, water, urban studies, forests, coastal management and others.

Professor Gabriele Bammer

Gabriele Bammer is a professor at the National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health, ANU College of Medicine, Biology and Environment, The Australian National University. She is also a research fellow at the Program in Criminal Justice Policy and Management at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government and the convenor of the ARC Centre of Excellence in Policing and Security’s Knowledge Integration research program.

Gabriele is developing the new discipline of Integration and Implementation Sciences to improve
research strengths for tackling complex real-world problems through synthesis of disciplinary and stakeholder knowledge, comprehensively understanding and managing unknowns and providing integrated research support for policy and practice change (see http://i2s.anu.edu.au).

Dr Leonie Pearson

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. Leonie 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.

Workshop 4: Murray-Darling Basin: overview, issues, context

This half-day workshop provided MDBfutures researchers with an overview of the social, economic and environmental issues confronting the basin, from the perspective of experts and practitioners. It gave critical context to the multi-disciplinary research of the network and provided a valuable opportunity for MDBfutures researchers to gain insights into the Murray-Darling Basin and to provide context for individual research projects.

The workshop included speakers from MDBA and ANU who led discussions on:

An overview of MDB management – what is it and where are we up to?  
(Presented by Jason Alexandra, General Manager Ecosystem Management, MDBA)

MDB facts and figures – the economy and demography of the basin  
(Presented by Phil Townsend, Senior Advisor Social and Economic Branch, MDBA)

Where have we come from? – lessons from history  
(Presented by Daniell Connell, Research Fellow, ANU)

River management – running the river  
(Presented by David Dreverman, Executive Director River Management, MDBA)

Basin communities and engagement – whose basin is it?  
(Presented by Katrina McGuire, General Manager Stakeholder Engagement, MDBA)

Download slides from some of the presenters

Go to the Murray-Darling Basin Authority Website