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2015 started off with and UC’s Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research, Professor Frances Shannon, hosting an MDBfutures’ event for our government and research partners to brief them on what we have planned for 2015 and beyond.

We have also signed new MOUs with the Murray-Darling Basin Authority and the ACT Office of the Commission for Sustainability and the Environment.

Our seminar series has continued with Dr Colin Chartres presenting on “Can there be a harmonious relationship between agriculture and the environment in a hungry world?” in February.

Seminar
On 28 April, Dr Sue Powell will talk about how multi-objective optimisation can provide water managers and decision makers with realistic scenarios that can maximise the benefit of environmental flows.

Survey on the Macquarie Marshes
We invite you to contribute to a survey being conducted as part of the “An integrated hydro-ecological and socio-economic model of environmental flow delivery to wetlands: A case study of Macquarie Marshes in Australia” project.
Science-to-Policy Leadership Program for mid-career ‘rising stars’

The Peter Cullen Trust Science to Policy Leadership Program trains, networks and supports Australia’s future water leaders. This program is designed to bring about sustainable change, not just temporary inspiration.

The Program focuses on raising awareness of key issues amongst our mid-career rising stars and building leadership and communication skills specifically geared towards bringing about positive change in water and catchment management in Australia. The Trust selects participants who are highly skilled and motivated and can continue the work of Peter Cullen. The Program is a journey of personal discovery. It challenges participants to stretch themselves beyond their current boundaries and realise their potential to make a real difference in their chosen water related careers.

New MoUs - Expanding our Collaborations

In the first months of 2015 we have executed two new Memoranda of Understanding with government partners. These will continue to apply MDB futures’ multi-disciplinary capacity to support the evidence base for management of the Murray-Darling Basin.

In January we expanded our successful collaboration with the Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) through another MOU. Activities under this MOU will include:

- Shared hosting and support of distinguished scientists via the UC-MDBA Distinguished Visitor Scheme
- The facilitation of placements of UC research staff and students in MDBA to support research projects and gain an understanding of the policy context; and placement of agency staff in UC on research ‘sabbatical’ through the UC-MDBA Visiting Fellow Scheme
- Providing support for applications for third party funding of priority work (eg ARC, RRDC)
- Participation in co-supervision of PhD students
- Co-hosting events, such as conferences, seminars and symposia
- Providing access to data and information
- Providing access to networks and engagement mechanisms
- Providing briefings to assist UC research staff to gain an understanding of the MDB policy and planning issues
- Co-production of papers for publication in areas of shared interest and expertise

Executed in February 2015, the MOU between UC and the Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment (OSCE) will facilitate collaboration between the OCSE and the University, especially in supporting evidence based reporting on water resources and the environment. Collaboration will be on certain research, innovation and professional education projects.

We also anticipate working together on:

- Scientific research projects
- Joint academic appointments with expertise in research areas mutually beneficial
- Honours Scholarships
• PhD Scholarships
• Identifying and seeking opportunities for joint applications for Project funding from third party funding bodies (eg ARC and RRDC)
• Co-hosting events, such as conferences, seminars and symposia
• Providing access to networks and engagement mechanisms
• Placement of UC research staff and students in OCSS to support research projects and to gain an understanding of the policy context

This MOU has already seen its first project approved. The project is to assist in the development of the water chapter of the ACT 2015 State of the Environment Report (SoER), in consultation with OCSE staff, by providing analysis of data gathered against SoER indicators as supplied by the OCSE. We look forward to this being the first of many successful projects under this MOU.

The University of Canberra will continue to build on the successful work of MDBfutures to ensure that the productive research, collaboration and capacity activities to date, continue into the future.

Regional Wellbeing Survey

There’s a lot of discussion about what makes a rural community a good place to live and what helps communities deal with difficult times. The Regional Wellbeing Survey is designed to uncover new insights into how the many changes occurring in rural and regional communities affect the people who live in them. These include, for example, coal-seam gas, water reform, and changes in markets for agricultural products. However, changes of this type are not usually linked on their own to large differences in wellbeing. Wellbeing is the outcome of many things going on in a community, or in a person’s life, at any time. Wellbeing tends to falter when problems mount up or last a long time and there aren’t enough counter-balancing good things happening.

If we want to better support wellbeing in rural and regional areas, we need to understand all the different things going on in a community, or in a person’s life, rather than focusing on only one or two of them. In many cases, what matters is not so much the type of change people are facing but whether they have the resources to adapt successfully to that change.

Many organisations have been reaping the benefits of supporting the Regional Wellbeing Survey since its launch in 2013. Anyone can access the survey results for regions from which more than 100 responses were received, and this means that organisations such as community groups, government agencies, local government and industry associations are able to make decisions from information that is ‘close to the ground’ rather than general data that is based on ‘national trends’ and doesn’t take into account the big variations between small towns or regions throughout Australia.

With the launch last year of the Urban Wellbeing Survey and the planned launch in 2015 of the Aboriginal Wellbeing Survey, MDBfutures and UC are part of a large enterprise gathering information that will give a detailed picture of the state of wellbeing right across Australia.

This is only possible through partnerships in which urban, rural and regional organisations across the country work with the research team to fund and promote the surveys. In 2014, more than 200 organisations were involved, ranging from the MDBA and Victorian Department of Environment and Primary Industries to the National Farmers Federation, National Rural Health Alliance, Regional Australia Institute, Regional Capitals Australia and the
Council of Capital City Lord Mayors, to name just a few.

If you would like to be involved in supporting this survey or wish to access the results of the survey, please contact jacki.schirmer@canberra.edu.au or helen.berry@canberra.edu.au, or general enquires at regionalwellbeing@canberra.edu.au