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- **MDBfutures Researcher Snapshots**:
  - Brenda Dyack, 'Ecological Economics for MDBfutures' project
  - Phil Roberts, 'Towards Place Based Education in the MDB' project

- **MDBfutures 'Towards Place Based Education in the MDB' project**.
  The key outcome for this project will be the development of the MDB education programs, resources, and principles for working with MDB schools and communities to introduce more nuanced understandings of sustainability in the curriculum. Specifically, an understanding of the diverse perspectives of sustainability will be uncovered, and as such the variety of views will be able to be engaged with productively. Specifically, MDBA education programs will be evaluated against these perspectives and new approaches to engaging schools and communities will be developed.

- **Workshop Report** - Sustainable Development: connecting practice with theory presented by Dr Jean Chesson, Senior Principal Scientist, Department of Agriculture

- **Upcoming Workshops**
  - Thursday, 31st October: Ecological Responses to Groundwater Decline, Salinity and Drought

- **MDBfutures Visitors Program**

- **Regionalwellbeing Survey**

- **Did you know?**
Welcome

Welcome to the Murray-Darling Basin Futures Collaborative Research Network (MDB/futures). Our monthly Newsletter profiles our people and coming events.

Podcasts and presentation downloads from our workshops are available on our website.

To find out information on all of our projects please go to our website.

Remember if you have anything you want to share or articles you think would prove valuable to our readers please send them to me at mdbfutures@canberra.edu.au .... Editor

Snapshot: Dr Brenda Dyack

Dr Brenda Dyack is Senior Fellow working on the 'Ecological Economics for MDB/futures' project.

Brenda is excited about being part of a team where the focus is on 'the positive'. She is enjoys focussing on what comes next and the positive potential for adjusting to a new future.

Collaborating with people in the Basin who are living through enormous change to every aspect of their lives and fundamental wellbeing makes her feel her work is meaningful and relevant.

Snapshot: Philip Roberts

Dr Philip Roberts is an Assistant Professor (Curriculum & Pedagogy) in the Faculty of ESTeM. Phil is also the Project Leader for the newest MDB/futures project - 'Towards Place Based Education in the Murray-Darling Basin'

Phil firmly believes that in education places differ and there is no one-size-fits-all solution.

He is looking forward to investigating a new, and extremely important, area of education and community development. Often referred to as 'spatial turn', Place and Space in education are relatively new areas. Phil is excited to be working with a team that is energised and eagerly looking forward to pushing the boundaries of established research methods - of exploring new ways of researching and working with communities and the curriculum.

Our Newest Program: 'Towards Place Based Education in the MDB'

The key to the successful implementation of the Murray-Darling Basin (MDB) Plan is to develop well-informed dialogue among the various stakeholders in the Basin, facilitated and encouraged by the MDBA. Fundamental to this is quality community and school based education programs that provide the prerequisite local knowledge and skills. However, a central concern is how sustainability is understood and currently taught in schools under the new Australian Curriculum. Evidence suggests that it focuses too much on the environmental aspect and not enough on the socio-cultural and economic aspects.
This project explores the ways in which sustainability is understood in MDB communities (including Indigenous, rural, small towns and regional centres); how it is presented in MDBA education programs, and the ways it is currently taught in schools in the MDB region. Upon identifying the various perspectives on sustainability the project will examine how MDBA education programs and the Australian Curriculum, including its cross curriculum priorities of Sustainability and Indigenous perspectives, can best be adapted through place-based education to incorporate local knowledge in education.

Read more about this project

MDBfutures Visitors Program

This year a number of visitors are collaborating with our researchers.

Dr Glyn Wittwer (Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for Policy Studies at Monash University), was hosted by National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM) and the 'Modelling the effects of external shocks like drought and cuts in water on well-being in the Murray-Darling Basin' project.

Glyn presented a seminar on 'Lessons from TERM-H2O Modelling of the Murray-Darling Basin' and worked with MDBfutures' researchers on integrating GCE and micro-simulation models to better predict the effects of water reform.

Glyn is working with MDBfutures' researchers in the development of a proposal to progress this work.

Professor Brent Mishler (Department of Integrative Biology & Director of University & Jepson Herbaria, University of California, Berkeley, USA), was hosted by the Institute for Applied Ecology (IAE) and the 'Conserving Biodiversity' project.

Brent gave presentations on the phylogenetic methodologies our researchers are applying to the ANU School of Environment and in the MDBfutures Workshop series.

He also participated in drafting a collaborative paper with MDBfutures' researchers, ANU and CSIRO. The draft included a detailed list of analyses and the main headings of the paper. The paper will be titled "Phylogenetic approaches to assessing biodiversity across multiple taxonomic groups in the Murray-Darling Basin, Australia".

Professor Ric Scarpa (Environmental Economics, Waikato Management School, University of Waikato, NZ), was hosted by the Institute for Applied Ecology (IAE) and the 'An integrated hydro-ecological and socio-economic model of environmental water delivery to a wetland' project.

During Ric's visit he contributed to survey development and experimental design of the choice modelling component of the project. He will return to UC later in the year to progress the project.

Currently, Ric is working with the project team to set up focus groups to test the presentation of the outputs of the eco-hydrological modelling and is working with an online designer to build the survey.

Regionalwellbeing survey

The Regionalwellbeing survey is a unique initiative, as researchers from multiple MDBfutures projects have collaborated to ensure the survey can provide a comprehensive picture of the many factors that influence health and wellbeing. This survey will produce important information about how changes to agriculture, the environment and water affect regional and rural communities.

An MDBfutures initiative this survey is also supported by farming, community and government organisations across rural and regional Australia.
To do the survey online go to [www.regionalwellbeing.org.au](http://www.regionalwellbeing.org.au), or call 1800 981 499 to request a hard copy.

2013 Workshops
Topic for the final workshop of 2013:

- Incorporating justice and fairness into water planning: A comprehensive Social Justice Framework for water and Natural Resource Management (21 Nov)

[Click here](#) to subscribe to the workshop invitation list

Did you know?

- This month's banner picture was taken in the Macquarie Marshes and was photographed in March 2013 by Dr Fiona Dyer Project Leader 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.

- You can view podcasts and download slides from some of our MDBfutures workshops via our website. Please note that slides are subject to copyright and may not be used without the permission of the author(s). [Look at slides available for download](#)

- Copies of earlier newsletters are available on our website. [Look at earlier newsletters](#)

Snapshot: Dr Brenda Dyack

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

The best part of the MDBfutures CRN is the focus on 'the positive'. After years of debate and friction about impacts of reduced water availability to irrigators, some hard decisions have now been made regarding how much water to shift to the environment. So now, as researchers, we can focus on what comes next and the positive potential for adjusting to a new future. We get to collaborate with people in the Basin who will be living through enormous change to every aspect of their lives and fundamental wellbeing during this transition and that makes our work meaningful and relevant. This is what excites me and I'm sure excites all the CRN researchers.

**What is involved in your role within the CRN / Project?**

My project focus is on estimating quantitative and qualitative benefits to people of improved environmental condition in the Basin. The magnitude of the benefits of shifting water from irrigation to the environment are largely unknown and difficult to quantify and so I’ve chosen to focus on this particular challenge. At present we’ve just concluded a survey of recreational visitors to the Coorong at the Mouth of the Murray in South Australia near Goolwa. We are now evaluating the information provided by visitors and will soon be able to provide estimates of the benefits of improved environmental condition to this Basin group. We’re proud to say that we have heard time and time again from the visitors that ‘it is about time someone took an interest in what matters to us!’

I also try to be involved across projects where I hope my past research and policy work in the Basin might contribute to wider understanding of the 'way things were' and 'how we got to where we are'.

**What has been your favourite part of the CRN / Project so far?**

The best part of the CRN is being able to get into the field and talk to Basin residents and those who care for the Basin at the state, federal and local level. Our survey of Coorong visitors covered most
weekends from January to Easter and that's a fair chunk of time to learn a lot about what matters.

**What were you doing before MDBfutures?**
Before the CRN I worked for a decade in various roles related to the Murray-Darling Basin. This included time as a Senior Economist, Researcher and Advisor on Basin water policy, including the Federal water buy-back, while at the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences, the Murray-Darling Basin Authority, the federal environment department, the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and the CSIRO. And before all that, I lived mainly in Canada where I worked on a number of collaborative research and policy projects much like the CRN.

**Did you know?**
I grew up in Canada on the shores of Lake Ontario, one of the Great Lakes, where water is so plentiful we hardly think about it. These lakes form the largest group of freshwater lakes on Earth and each one is so large that you can't see the other side and the waves can be big enough for your boogie board. And, by the way, we've been recycling this water forever!

**Something interesting**
Lake Ontario means 'lake of shining waters' in the Wyandot (Huron) First Nations language. The Great Lakes contain 21% of the world's fresh surface water: 22.8 billion megalitres or, in standard Australian measure, if my calculations are right, 40.6 million Sydney Harbours. This is enough water to cover the 48 contiguous U.S. states to a uniform depth of 2.9 m.
The total surface area of the lakes is approximately the same size as the United Kingdom.

**Want to connect?**
Call Brenda on (02) 6201 2763 or email her at Brenda.dyack@canberra.edu.au

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**Snapshot: Philip Roberts**

**What excites you about your work with MDBfutures?**
I'm looking forward to working with a fantastic team of researchers to investigate a new, and extremely Important, area of education and community development. Place and Space in education are relatively new areas, often referred to as the 'spatial turn', so it is exciting to be getting a project underway using these as key concepts. Perhaps more importantly though, there is a real sense of commitment from all involved and the MDBA to make a difference. The prospect of developing new ways for communities, community education, schools and the MDBA to work productively together to sustain the natural environment and communities brings a real sense of reward and purpose.

I remember a teacher in an irrigated area telling me in an interview about a 'clash' he had with some locals over the issue of sustainability. He was a very sensible teacher trying to be balanced and open, teaching a mandatory subject. The problem was the books he was using were very 'metro' in their view of sustainability, and consequently caused conflict. If we can come up with approaches and resources that can avoid these value clashes, but work towards shared sustainability goals, I'll be very happy.

**What is involved in your role within the CRN / Project?**
I'll have the privilege of coordinating a group of researchers and working with some MDBA communities. We'll be rolling out a survey to understand the ways sustainability is understood throughout the basin and then using this to work with the MDBA on their education programs. Most importantly we get to push the boundaries of our methods and explore new ways of researching and working with communities and the curriculum. So there will be a fair bit of problem solving and critical engagement. I'm also looking forward to the second half of the project where we'll be working with some case study sites and schools to develop collaborative curriculum planning processes that develop shared understandings of sustainability. Through this we hope to be able to describe approaches teachers can use to understand, and then develop their curriculum from, the local knowledge's in their communities.

**What has been your favourite part of the CRN / Project so far?**
The discussions with the MDBA and colleagues about the issues and how we can investigate them in
a meaningful and respectful way has been great. I can see that this project will make a great contribution to both opening up areas of research in rural education and community engagement, as well as develop new methods of researching these issues. The team at the CRN have been fantastic in their support and guidance in helping seed and then broker this project. We can get lost in our terminology and language, so it has been great to have to sit back and write about these things with those outside of our areas. You learn a lot about what you know, don’t know and need to understand in such a process.

**What were you doing before MDBfutures?**
Before the MDB futures project I was teaching in pre-service and Masters programs in Education, now the faculty of ESTeM. Prior to that I taught in remote and rural NSW schools for 13 years and completed a major national study on staffing rural, remote and isolated schools.

Lately I’ve been also working on a side project I developed on ‘the spatial distribution of curriculum in (rural) NSW schools’ with colleagues from CSU & Melb. The project isn’t funded but is producing some fantastic and fascinating results about student access to curriculum, their educational achievement in NAPLAN and the HSC, and in the influence of space & place. What we see is that some towns are thriving while others have a few more challenges, and understanding this is a lot more complex than isolation or SES. This type of analysis hasn’t been done before so I’m looking forward to publishing from it and evolving it into a national project (with funding, so looking for collaborators).

Other than that I spend my time fighting for rural communities, teachers and students for recognition of their different needs. Put plainly, we seem to have forgotten in education that places differ and there is no one-size-fits-all solution. In fact such approaches work against these communities and position them on the margins. The subtle message becomes that to ‘succeed’ one must leave or value other ways of being – that’s not very sustainable for rural communities, rural places or rural knowledges.

**You’re favourite Quote**
I spent nearly five years at Lightning Ridge and four in Nimbin, so I have a few stories, but they’re not for printing... So perhaps a few quotes:

‘What we know, we may choose to care for. What we fail to recognize, we certainly won’t’ (Pyle, 2001, p.18.)

‘Curriculum that does not challenge the standard syllabus and conditions in society informs students that knowledge and the world are fixed and are fine the way they are, with no role for students to play in transforming them and no need to change.’ (Shor 1992, P. 12.)

**Want to connect?**
Call Phil on (02) 6206 8625 or email him at philip.roberts@canberra.edu.au

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