NEWSLETTER Issue 9, April 2013

In this issue:

~ **Snapshot**: Asadusjjaman Suman  
  Project: Predicting the response of water quality and groundwater dependent ecosystems to climate change and land management practises: an integrated modelling approach

~ **Snapshot**: Dr Sue Briggs  
  Project: Using an evidence – based approach in the optimisation of water allocation decisions

~ **CRC Bid Update**: Murray-Darling Basin Futures – A new Cooperative Research Centre bid  
  *Article by Peter*

~ **Doctoral & Fellows Program**: Inside Story and Placement program

~ **Does Water Scarcity in the MDB affect Wellbeing?**: Article by Leonie Pearson and Brenda Dyack

~ **Workshops**: Some of what we have planned for 2013

~ **Did you know?**

~ **From the Editor**

Welcome

Welcome to the Murray-Darling Basin Futures Collaborative Research Network (MDBfutures). In our monthly Newsletter we 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 coming up.
Welcome to our newest members of the MDBfutures CRN team!

- Asadusijaman Suman, a PhD student working on the Climate Change project; and
- And Carlos Gonzalez-Orosco and Peter Unmack, our 2 new Research Fellows who are both working on the Conserving Biodiversity project.

Staffing for the Murray-Darling Basin Futures Collaborative Research Network (MDBfutures) is now completed with all Fellows positions filled and final scholarships awarded.

From the Editor

Welcome to 2013! I hope the New Year sees you well rested and keen.

This month sees the implementation of our Placement Program which will broaden the experience and exposure of our students and fellows in seeing how things are done outside the university environment.

Leonie and Brenda have written a brief article on Human Ecology, bringing together their thoughts after having attended the SHE conference in January of this year.

Our proposed CRC based on the Murray-Darling Basin is generating a lot of interest! Read the report on our recent Partner Workshop held earlier this month.

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 Susan Nichols

Sue is a Research Fellow who is excited about her science being relevant and effective in the real world!

Sue has a lot of experience in freshwater ecology and teaching, the Australian River Assessment System (AUSRIVAS) predictive modelling and Eco Evidence are particular interests.

Read a short profile on Dr Nichols

Snapshot - Prof. Arthur Georges

Arthur is leading the MDBfutures' project on Biodiversity conservation.

Arthur is particularly interested in making people and governments aware of the need to take substantial and effective action if we are not to do irreversible damage to the environment through widespread species extinctions, and so eat the quality of life and opportunity for future generations.

Read a short profile on Prof Georges

CRC Bid Update - Murray-Darling Basin Futures – A new Cooperative Research Centre bid

We are partnering in the development of a CRC bid - Basin Futures - to provide an integrated, multi-disciplinary framework to underpin futures that meet the needs of people, environments and the

economy. An outline of the bid is [here](#).

On February 11, we held a large workshop of potential partners to further develop the CRC bid and to invite partner interest. Currently, the MDBA, UC, ANU, CSU and USQ are partnering in the development of the bid, with more partners interested in joining.

Opening the planning workshop, MDBA Chair Craig Knowles spoke about the critical importance of science in underpinning the Basin Plan and its implementation and that there was much to be done—both in generating knowledge and learning—and in getting the relationship right between science, policy and management. Craig said that he saw the work of the CRC as central.

The workshop considered a number of frameworks that the bid might use to elaborate the research programs—the adaptive management cycle, landscape risk assessment and management and case studies. Case studies offered the capacity to bring the integrated approach to focus on major challenges and opportunities—regionally, sectorally and institutionally.

The CRC bid will need to find and focus on the 'sweet spot'—the area of strategic research that meets the needs of end-users, is consistent with the CRC program goals, and leverages the capacity of researchers.

Agreed next steps in bid development are to develop the research project detail and to complete the 'invitation to invest' document. Additional partners are identifying themselves and joining the bid.

[Read a report of the CRC Partner Workshop](#)  
[Read a report on the CRC End User Workshop](#)  
[Return to Beginning of Newsletter](#)

**Doctoral and Fellows Program**

The MDBfutures Doctoral Program capitalises on distinctive features of MDBfutures to provide students and fellows with an:

- Understanding of the policy context and how to shape it
- Understanding of multi-disciplinary, integrated research and development

This year will see the continuation of the 'Inside Story' series. 'Inside Story' provides access to very senior decision-makers in an informal, 'Chatham House Rule'* environment. These invitation-only events give MDBfutures students and fellows privileged access to the world of NRM policy and politics—to deepen their understanding of how decisions are made.

* When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed. The rule allows people to speak as individuals and to express views that may not be those of their organisations, and therefore, encourages free discussion. Speakers are free to voice their own opinions, without concern for their personal reputation or their official duties and affiliations.

2013 has also seen the implementation of our Placement Program, one of the variety of opportunities available to MDBfutures' students and fellows. Short-term placements in partner Departments and Agencies provide an opportunity to:

- experience policy development and program delivery first-hand
- develop their understanding of the wider context and application of knowledge
- build relationships with policy colleagues

The placements are facilitated through an MOU with our partners. Initially, students will placed in MDBA, SEWPAC and ABARES.

[Click here](#) to read more about the MDBfutures Doctoral and Fellows Program and its activities.

[Return to Beginning of Newsletter](#)

**Does Water Scarcity in the Murray-Darling Basin affect Wellbeing?**

1/05/2013
This question was addressed in a CRN session at the recent ‘SHE Conference’ held in Canberra earlier this month.

The session included seven MDBfutures researchers. Helen Berry, Lean O’Brien, Leonie Pearson and Jacki Schirmer each presented on their various research projects on this challenging issue.

They were joined in the presentations and facilitation by MDBfutures Fellow Neil Byron, who provided the economics of the issue, and Jim Donaldson who facilitated and contributed drawing on his experience leading research development and social and economic analysis for the Murray-Darling Basin Authority.

Read Article written by Dr Brenda Dyack and Dr Leonie Pearson

2013 Workshops
Some of the topics for this year include:

- Speed Dating your Project (for MDBfutures Researchers only)
- Indigenous Water Perspective on the MDB
- Community Resilience
- Migration in the MDB
- Recreation values at the Coorong

Click here should you wish to subscribe to this list.

Did you know?

- The Murray-Darling Basin Plan was approved by Parliament in late 2012 with a vote of 95%. Go to the MDBA site to read about the next steps.

- The photo of the rice farm near Leeton, in the Banner of this month’s Newsletter was taken by Jacki Schirmer when she participated in the MDBfutures field trip last September.

- You can download slides from some of our MDBfutures workshops via our website. Please note that these 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 from our website. Look at earlier newsletters

Snapshot: Sue Nichols

Dr Sue Nichols is a Lecturer and Research Fellow with the Murray-Darling Basin Futures Collaborative Research Network based at the Institute for Applied Ecology (IAE). Sue is working on the project, 'Using an evidence-based approach in the optimization of water allocation decisions'.

What excites you about your work with MDBfutures?
The collaborative opportunities through engaging with people in different disciplines (ecological, social and economic) are exciting because our science has a much better chance of being relevant and used.

What is involved in your role within the CRN / Project?
I am project leader for the project titled "Using an evidence-based approach in the optimization of
water allocation decisions" within the Environmental Watering theme.

This project will determine ecological water requirements for some specific aquatic communities. We will develop an eco-hydrology model and optimization to assist in understanding the trade-offs between environmental-flow benefits and other uses, such as irrigation.

**What has been your favourite part of the CRN / Project so far?**
The modelling activity promises to expand our capacity to optimally allocate water for environmental and other purposes, and hence improve our ability to manage river systems.

**What were you doing before MDBfutures?**
I worked with the Institute for Applied Ecology, University of Canberra on other projects involving freshwater ecology, biological assessment of river condition and eWater CRC projects. Teaching, the Australian River Assessment System (AUSRIVAS) predictive modelling and Eco Evidence are particular interests.

**Something surprising?**
"If we knew what it was we were doing, it would not be called research, would it?"
Albert Einstein

**Want to connect?**
Call Sue on Ph (02) 6201 5408 or email her at: sue.nichols@canberra.edu.au

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**Snapshot - Prof. Arthur Georges**

Professor Arthur Georges is a Distinguished Professor in the Institute for Applied Ecology, IAE, who is leading Conserving Biodiversity project.

**What excites you about your work with MDBfutures?**
Managing the Murray Darling Basin is one of the most pressing environmental challenges Australia faces. History has told us that ecosystem services, once compromised, are extremely difficult and costly to replace, so one imperative is to maintain the condition of the river at its current state at the very least, and this will require sound ecological knowledge and a good foundation in terms of the environmental assets that remain. I am keen to be a part of generating and synthesizing this knowledge.

**What is involved in your role within the CRN / Project?**
I am leading the project on Biodiversity conservation within the CRN, and engaging directly in the application of DNA technologies to learn more of the diversity of life within the aquatic environments of the basin, how it is distributed across the basin, and what are the historical and contemporary drivers of this distribution.

**What has been your favourite part of the CRN / Project so far?**
The way in which researchers with a diverse set of backgrounds and experience have been brought together to work on these challenging projects.

**What were you doing before MDBfutures?**
I was and am a Professor in Applied Ecology with the University of Canberra, former Director of the IAE and Dean of the Faculty of Applied Science.

**Did you know?**
For all our efforts, Australia, and the rest of the world, is lurching toward a biodiversity crisis. The next 50 years will likely see a doubling of the human population as did the last 50 years, but the impact of human civilization during the next 50 years will be much greater than that of the last 50 years. Our reach is already global, and average per capita consumption rates are also rising. We all need to be part of pressing our governments to take substantial and effective action if we are not to do irreversible damage to the environment through widespread species extinctions, and so eat quality of life and opportunity for future generations. We need to know what effective action to take as well as taking action. Science has a pivotal role.
**MDBfutures Doctoral Program**

The MDBfutures Doctoral Program capitalises on distinctive features of MDBfutures to provide students and fellows with an:

- Understanding of the policy context and how to shape it
- Understanding of multi-disciplinary, integrated research and development

In combination with UC and Institute/Faculty specific dimensions of their doctoral programs, these MDBfutures students and fellows have access to a range of experiences and activities which provide broad context and capability in conducting policy-relevant, integrated research. In the language of UC, research for the real world; research with impact!

**For:** PhD students (and Fellows as appropriate)

**Comprised of:**
- UC doctoral program elements
- UC Research Centre and Faculty specific elements
- MDBfutures-specific elements

The following are current and planned activities for MDBfutures PhD students:

1. **POLICY CONTEXT, INFLUENCING & UNDERSTANDING**

   **Activity**
   - Government departments and agencies as partners
   - Placements in agencies / departments
   - Inside Story
   - Policy-relevant MDBfutures projects
   - MDBfutures Workshops
   - MDBfutures Public Lectures
   - MDBfutures Project Liaison Officers

2. **MULTI-DISCIPLINARY; INTEGRATED RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT**

   **Activity**
   - MDBfutures Workshops
   - MDBfutures Integration theme
   - MDBfutures Field trips
   - MDBfutures Multi-disciplinary projects
   - MDBfutures Trans-disciplinary placements
   - MDBfutures Visiting fellows
   - MDBfutures Networking opportunities
   - Data Access

3. **ACCESS TO WIDER UNIVERSITY AND RESEARCH EXPERIENCE**

   **Activity**
   - Other UC Disciplines
   - Partnership with USQ, CSU and ANU
   - ANU HDR student profile
   - Placements with ABARES
   - ANU Adjunct profile (research fellows and senior research fellows)

   **Other activities as requested/suggested by PhD students and their supervisors**
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