



Chair's message

On October 13, Michael Hoey, Keith Bristow and I met with Queensland Premier Anna Bligh. This was the week that the Premier operated from her offices in Townsville, and BWF took the opportunity to speak with her about the opportunities and challenges that exist in the Burdekin region. The main take-home message for the Premier was the importance of taking a whole-of-system, long-term strategic approach to managing the catchment; environmentally, socially and economically.

The Premier was impressed with the BWF's proactive collaborative approach. The group will continue to work with the broader community and promote this message to industry and all levels of government.

Cr Lyn McLaughlin, BWF Chair

Steve Marchant: PhD Study - Investing in ecological infrastructure



The Burdekin River

In the past, nature was seen as something wild that had to be tamed, and natural resources were perceived as being there for our taking. However, with environmental degradation going global over the past few decades, more and more academics, businesses and governments are adopting the ecosystem services approach towards natural resource management.

But, according to PhD student Steve Marchant (pictured), valuing ecosystem services that were previously seen as nature's gifts is only one step along the pathway towards ecologically sustainable development (ESD).

Steve argues that the biggest and most important step towards long-term ESD is yet to be taken, and that is: investing in ecological infrastructure.

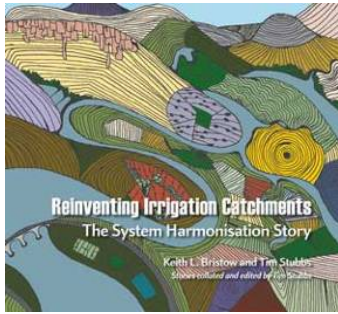
Like the various services provided by our transport, communications, energy, health and education infrastructure, the continued delivery of the ecosystem services that we need to live and prosper (clean air and water, soil nutrient replenishment, pollination and so on) is not possible without an underlying and interconnected ecological infrastructure. As tax-paying citizens, we readily accept, and even demand, ongoing investment to maintain and develop our roads, bridges, communications lines, hospitals, et cetera. Yet the need to *invest* in ecological infrastructure for its maintenance and development is virtually unrecognised.

As in any substantial, long-term investment, the key questions that need to be addressed first are: where, when, how and how much should we invest, in what?

In order to gain answers to these questions, Steve is running a series of focus groups with representatives of key stakeholder interests in the Lower Burdekin, including sugar growers, researchers, local government/governance, industry representatives, state/federal agency representatives, mixed growers and traditional owners.

The focus groups conducted so far have produced stimulating discussions regarding the need for better understanding of, and investment in, our ecosystems. Results of Steve's studies will be published in his thesis which is due to be submitted early in the New Year. Readers who would like more information about the project and/or the focus group studies can contact Steve on 0439 712 173 or at steve.marchant@csiro.au





System Harmonisation Experiences Shared

Achieving improved ecological, social and economic outcomes at a catchment scale and beyond is not easy, but Australia needs to face up to these complex challenges in order to leave a resilient and regenerative landscape for future generations.

The Cooperative Research Centre for Irrigation Futures (CRC IF) took up this challenge between 2006 and 2010, through its System Harmonisation research program.

System Harmonisation was an experiment in itself, one that sought to deliver a whole new approach to better integrating and improving the research and practice of irrigation and water management within a catchment context.

As an experiment, System Harmonisation was particularly successful in demonstrating that many different stakeholders need to, and can, come together to tackle difficult and complex problems that they could not tackle on their own. In doing so, they harness the energy and commitment of the group to make local, regional and even catchment scale change.

Reinventing Irrigation Catchments is the System Harmonisation story to date, and most importantly, the learning that has come from the experience. It is based on stories that have come directly from the people involved; they are real, honest and sometimes confronting.

With the closure of the CRC IF in September 2010, this book provides a platform for the future and encourages others to pick up the challenge, learn from the experiences and build on the successes achieved so far (see <http://www.irrigationfutures.org.au/SystemHarmonisationStory/>)



'Groundwater 2010 - the challenge of sustainable management' is the theme for the 2010 national groundwater conference jointly hosted by the International Association of Hydrogeologists and the Geological Society of Australia.

Being held in Canberra from October 31 to November 4, the conference has been structured with science, management and policy streams. These sessions will be supported by workshops and forums designed to activate discussion on specific groundwater challenges.

There are four major themes for the conference:

- Water policy environment (national, state, regional);
- Challenges and threats to groundwater management;
- Future opportunities; and
- Capacity building.

Visit <http://www.groundwater2010.com/>

Member Profile – Wayne Smith

Wayne Smith has lived in the Burdekin for 35 years and supports the BWF and its mission. He believes there are great benefits in stakeholders getting together to discuss water issues within the region.



"Having a mix of experienced and skilled people around the table discussing and formulating ideas and solutions has been very positive," he said.

Wayne brings expertise to the BWF from the two roles he holds in the Burdekin. He is CANEGROWERS member services manager for the Burdekin and secretary of the BRIA Irrigators Committee.

CANEGROWERS is the peak body for Australian sugarcane growers, providing strength, influence and representation of growers' interests at local, state, national and international levels. The BRIA Irrigators Committee oversees and represents the interests of farmers in the Burdekin River Irrigation Area.

enGauge

The Bureau of Meteorology has released a regular newsletter for people interested in water. To subscribe go to:

<http://bom.us1.list-manage1.com/subscribe?u=91e77db1cb6e1956adfabd736&id=3f19e8c2ce>