

# RECLAIMING THE FUTURE – Sustaining the Keystone Human Rangeland Community

David Eastburn Hay 8/8/12

*The most potent way of conserving biological diversity may be to protect the diversity of cultures that have stewarded the plant and animal communities*

Nabhan 1998





A large flock of birds, possibly terns, is captured in flight against a clear blue sky. The birds are scattered across the upper two-thirds of the frame, with some appearing closer and larger, while others are small specks in the distance. Below the birds, there is a line of green trees and shrubs, and at the very bottom, a body of water is visible. The overall scene suggests a natural, possibly coastal or wetland, environment.

*To keep the cultural and ecological values of a landscape  
you have to keep the farmers in it.*

Magnusson 26/11/07

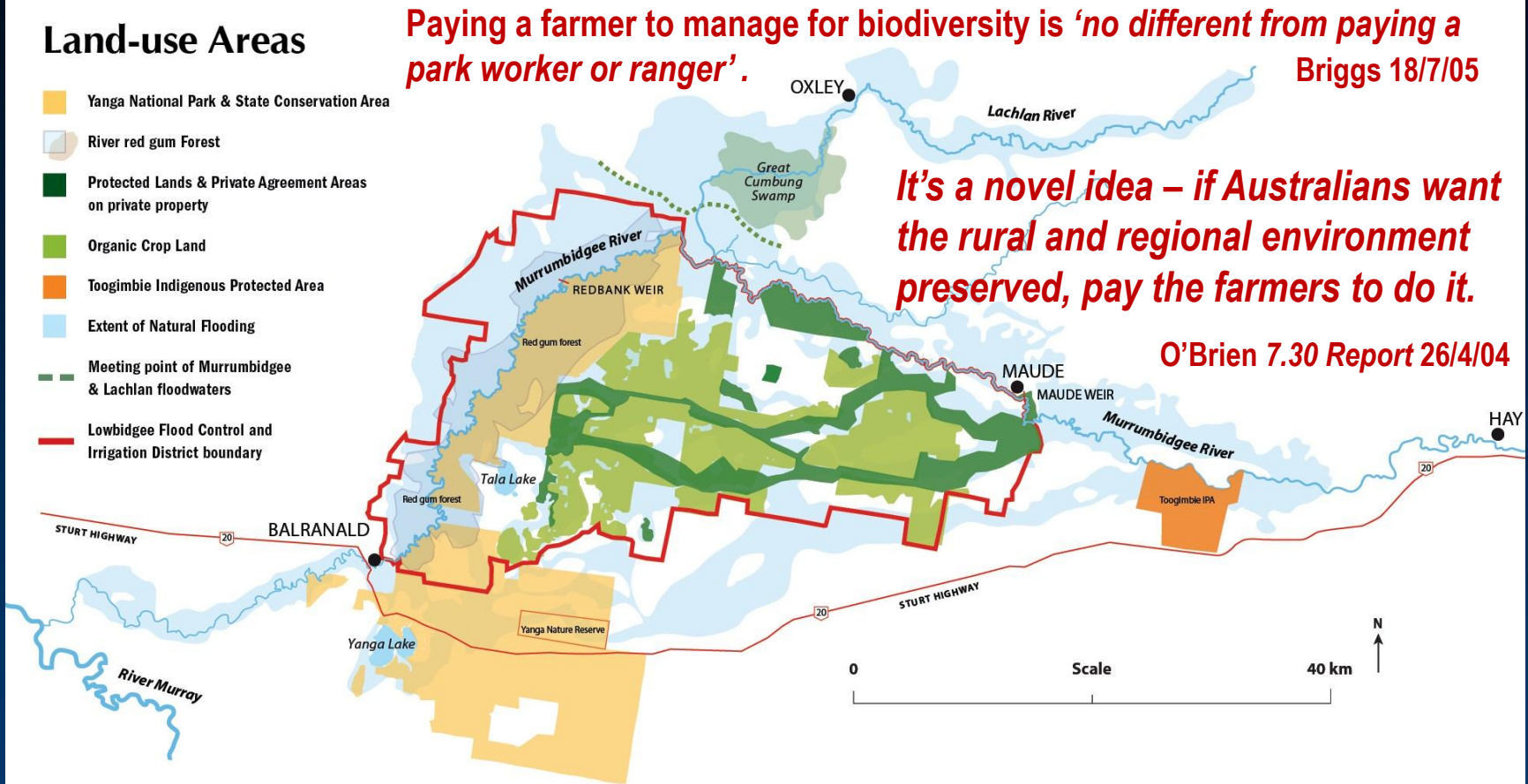
**Modified ecosystems increasingly require active human management by private groups, and especially landholders, to maximize services production. Governments do not have the financial or human resources, local knowledge, social memory, appropriate structure, or in many cases the authority, to achieve the task alone.**



# TRANSFORMATION TO AGRI-ECOLOGICAL LAND-USE FOR INCOME DIVERSITY

## Land-use Areas

-  Yanga National Park & State Conservation Area
-  River red gum Forest
-  Protected Lands & Private Agreement Areas on private property
-  Organic Crop Land
-  Toogimbie Indigenous Protected Area
-  Extent of Natural Flooding
-  Meeting point of Murrumbidgee & Lachlan floodwaters
-  Lowbidgee Flood Control and Irrigation District boundary



The transformation of agricultural production from one of the greatest threats to global biodiversity and ecosystem services to a major contributor to ecosystem integrity is unquestionably a key challenge of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

# SUSTAINABILITY – A CONTESTED PROCESS

Sustainability is at least as much about politics , injustice, and inequality as it is about science or the environment.

Agyeman 2005: 43

Change that is perceived to threaten existing power and status becomes an emotional rather than a rational process often resulting in ‘conditional’ commitment or subversion.

- **Working with change** (leadership to get the best from people and dynamic situations) rather than managing ‘business-as-usual’ can be a psychological as well as a **structural issue** for many technocrats and their bureaucracies.
- **Public-private property divide** – a ‘cultural’ barrier to designing contracts for ecosystem services production on private land.
- **Government-community partnership dilemma** - ‘fear and need’ as well as contrasting expectations. Many NRM executives are uncomfortable dealing directly with the public.
- Historical but **redundant NRM traditions**, such as managing ‘sites’ rather than ‘systems’, need to be amended.

# MURRAY-DARLING BASIN INITIATIVE : SUCCESS RELIANT ON AN ACTIVE AND AUTHENTIC COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

The official communiqué from the first Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Meeting held in November 1985, ‘stressed the importance of community participation in the resolution of the water, land and environmental management’ issues.

According to the MDB Ministerial Council (1990: iv), the ‘community’ is expected to be an active and equal partner with government because, to a large degree, the success of the Murray-Darling Basin Initiative:

Relies on the Community to lead and participate in the planning and implementation of on-ground works and measures and to adopt natural resources management practices consistent with sustainable use.

A generation-long (1990-2015) communication-community development program - recommended by a bipartisan intergovernmental parliamentary committee - was initiated to assist Basin residents to become effective partners:

To contribute significantly to the achievement of an informed, ecologically literate, empowered and active community with a Basin (holistic) ethic, in one generation (2015).



# A SNAPSHOT OF MDBC COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING/ CAPACITY REALIZATION ACTIVITIES 1990 - 1998





# ORIGINS OF BASIN COMMUNITY ALIENATION

**‘Recourse to technocracy’ (UNESCO 1980: 26) through ‘rationalisation presented as rationality’ (Flyvbjerg 1998: 2)**



In 1998, the ‘25-year’ communication and consultation program to assist Basin residents to become effective partners in the MDB Initiative was closed down as an internal bureaucratic ‘business-decision’ - after < 8 years. Its resources were diverted to support activities within the Commission office.

The specific issue of bureaucratic appropriation of resources for community projects had been raised with some of Australia’s most powerful politicians who had made provisions to prevent its occurrence – they proved inadequate.

**A BREACH OF TRUST.** Basin residents believed that again they had been excluded input to their futures and become victims of a very old bureaucratic strategy in relation to resources for community development:

*For that which belongs neither to him or his subjects, a prince may spend most lavishly ... The spending of other people’s substance will not diminish, but rather increase, his reputation.*

Machiavelli 1513

# **‘SPECIAL FOREVER’ SURVIVED FOR 18 YEARS THANKS TO AN INDEPENDENT NON- GOVERNMENT EXPERT PARTNER**

**[“Bearing witness” against ‘rationalization being presented as rationality’]**





# RECLAIMING A PLACE FOR COMMUNITY – BASED COMMERCIAL FISHING IN CENTURY 21 AUSTRALIA:

Success involved raising the profiles of fishers and their waterscape - and *especially* - the quantification of their contributions to regional social and ecological sustainability.



## Lakes & Coorong Fishery

### fishery info

- [wild fisheries with a future](#)
- [ethical sustainable harvest](#)
- [management of the fishery](#)
- [current scientific projects](#)

### initiatives & awards

- [the association](#)
- [awards](#)
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Fishers established a website to keep the public up-to-date with their activities and initiatives.

An independent expert partner helped fishers to achieve global Marine Stewardship Council accreditation as a sustainable multi-species 'wild' fishery.



# DIVERSITY AND FLEXIBILITY ARE KEYS TO SUSTAINABILITY

Local knowledge of fish species, climate and waterscape means that fishers can harvest sustainably by setting nets to catch specific species, constantly monitoring catches, and moving between species and ecosystems.



Self-imposed rules in relation to equipment and methods include banning mechanical cockle harvesting.



*Rotational harvest*

Locally developed waterscape-scale , cooperative whole of fishery management.





# THE POWER OF CHANGED PERSPECTIVE

## 'Sick' swamp to 'Water Kingdom' – Kristianstads, Sweden

*Turning an 'image problem' into an international asset*





# PEOPLE, PRIMARY PRODUCTION AND BIODIVERSITY CAN BE COMPLEMENTARY





# RECLAIMING THE FUTURE – TELLING YOUR OWN STORY

*I think that communities themselves have got to have the courage to take a leadership role - a bit like communities did when they came together at Corowa a hundred years ago ... I don't believe that bureaucracies will allow governments – and I say that deliberately – **bureaucracies won't allow governments** – to move the agenda forward in terms of the Basin without the community standing up.*

*Leith Bouilly, former Chair of the Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council Community Advisory Committee (1998-2005) and committee member (1992-1996). 15/3/05*

**The vital importance of social capacity in social-ecological systems resilience is often under-estimated:**

Social capacity includes capacity to respond constructively to change (adaptive management). It involves the capacity to develop social networks for horizontal and vertical collaboration. A key aspect includes mobilizing social memory of relevant past experiences as a 'frame-of-reference' to apply to current social-ecological management issues. TRUST and RESPECT are keys.

# AN INDEPENDENT EXPERT THIRD PARTNER TO ACT AS AN 'HONEST BROKER' BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY

## *A Way Forward: community and government with an independent expert third partner*

The establishment of a neutral national centre for unconditional discussion of social-ecological resilience in rural Australia [Later to be expanded into a centre and networks linking Australia, the SW Pacific and SE Asia.].

### **Role of a National Rural Resilience Centre**

- An independent Bridging Organization/ Independent arbiter;
- Conduct transformative leadership training;
- Bridge the natural-social sciences divide ;
- Re/examine resilient western, non-western, and vernacular Australian land-use models, commons governance, conservation methods etc. and publically exhibit and communicate 'success stories' to urban audiences; and
- Help to bridge the urban-rural divide.



# SOCIAL-ECOLOGICAL PROFESSIONALS WORKING *WITH* RURAL COMMUNITIES TO HELP REALIZE CAPACITIES

Experienced individuals with social-ecological expertise who are familiar with community cultures and historical patterns of resource use, as well as the cultures of researchers and managers, to **work with** rural community members as colleagues at a bioregional-scale to perform the following roles:

- Act as 'honest brokers' to help re-establish dialogue between government resource managers and resource users.
- Record social memory and make it accessible. Articulate the links between culture, power, and the environment.
- Weave together historical data, socio-cultural analysis, and the culture/power dimensions of the human environmental crises to explain actions that more quantified analysis may miss.

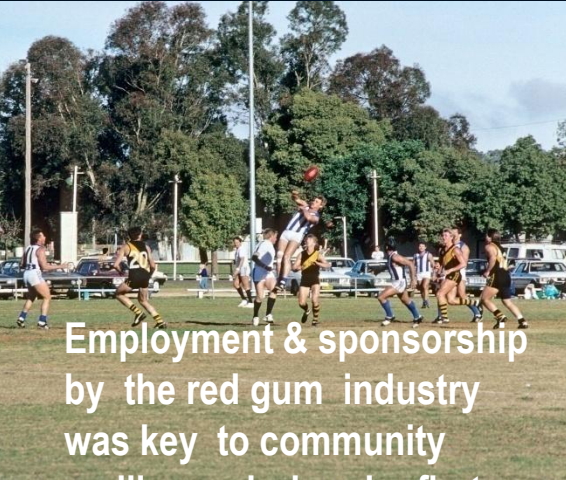
# COOPERATIVELY ARTICULATING THE ASSETS OF THE LOCAL AREA





# ADAPTING LAND-USE TO 'THE NATURE OF THE COUNTRY'

Gideon Lang 1850



Employment & sponsorship by the red gum industry was key to community resilience during dry first decade of 21<sup>st</sup> Century.



**Generational**

Red gum forests provide 'exceptional circumstance' income so that workers do not have to leave the community to find work during 'hard times'.

**Annual**

Movement of stock between ecosystems enables greater carrying capacity, a diversity of feed for healthier animals, and reduced ecological impacts.

**'Tyson Pattern'**

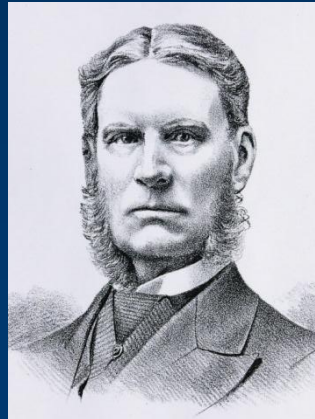
Social memory helping to address climate variability

# LOOKING WITHIN COMMUNITIES FOR ANSWERS

Celebrating rural Change Agents who take 'risks' on behalf of society



Accessing social memory of successful responses to past crises may provide frames-of-reference for dealing with current problems



*Social memory means that communities are not powerless to deal with crises. It gives confidence to take matters into your own hands, if necessary.*



# SHEAROUTBACK AS AN INVALUABLE VENUE TO RAISE THE PUBLIC PROFILE OF RANGELANDS

## *Temporary Exhibition space*

Regular exhibitions (at least once a year) on various themes to maintain the profile of rangelands and its human face by exploring current social, economic and ecological issues. A useful networking and social event – opportunity to invite speakers etc.

## *Grounds*

Develop a program of interpretive signage to explain how rangelands and the pastoral industry 'works'. Explain the geological origins of the local landscape and help people to 'read the landscape'. Present the rich pastoral history of the western Riverina.

## *Directional hub*

*An information centre to encourage visitors to explore rangelands further – promote ShearOutback-Yanga-Mungo loop, advertise 'b & bs', open gardens, pastoral architecture, specialist tours/ stays for artists/ bird-watchers etc.*





*For those that love it and understand,  
The saltbush plain is a wonderland.*

*'Banjo' Patterson. 'In the Droving Days'*

