



I N L A N D R I V E R S N E T W O R K



Annual Report for 2010-2011

Twenty years ago a dramatic blue green algal outbreak in the Darling River was the catalyst for establishment of the Inland Rivers Network. Since that time IRN has been a consistent politically unaligned advocate for the health of our rivers and wetlands, working with and through our member groups and supporters to build better understanding and improved management frameworks. Although a lot of ground has been covered in that time, the need for a uniting voice for better inland river health is as strong as ever.

The major focus for IRN through the past year has been the Murray Darling Basin Planning process. The need for a robust and scientifically grounded Murray Darling Basin Plan to restore the environmental health of the system and thus underpin the sustainability and viability of the communities that depend on it is paramount. The bipartisan support given to the Commonwealth Water Act was a great step forward, but translating this into practice is proving remarkably difficult in the face of the many vested interests, despite the rhetoric of support.

A full year of activity has been made possible through mix of grants and donations, enabling continued employment of Emma Hollows as Administration Officer and recent upgrade of her role into that of IRN Coordinator.

The quarterly newsletter, 'IRN News', has remained a valuable educational resource with information about opportunities to get involved in water reforms throughout the Basin and a chance to learn from the research and knowledge presented from a range of external authors. IRN thanks those involved in generously providing both text and photo contributions to the newsletter. Production of 'IRN News' now includes a colour electronic version. The mailing list has expanded, with the vibrant electronic version delivered to around one third of recipients, as well as being available for download from the IRN website. The mail-out process has now been streamlined through the transfer to an Access database for subscription records.

IRN has been actively involved in various meetings on the Murray-Darling Basin Plan – both through initiation/organisation and attendance. IRN representatives have attended key stakeholder meetings for the release of the *Guide to the proposed Basin Plan* (October 2010), technical briefing sessions on the 'Guide' by the Murray-Darling Basin Authority (November 2010), MDBA public forums on the 'Guide', multiple eNGO roundtable meetings with Minister Burke and meetings with key advisors.

IRN has also had a key role in facilitating the development of the *Voices of the Murray-Darling* alliance. This alliance is made up of diverse groups from across rural and metropolitan Australia all calling for a strong Basin Plan that will make the most out of this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to reform the management of the Murray-Darling Basin's water resources.

IRN has made substantial submissions, some received with significant responses from departments and agency staff, to a range of areas over the past year including;

- the **State Water Corporation draft Environmental Management Plan 2011-2016** (Sept 2010)
- the **National Water Initiative 2011 Biennial Assessment and Review** (Nov 2010)
- the Murray-Darling Basin Authority in response to ***Guide to the proposed Basin Plan*** (Dec 2010)
- the NSW Office of Water on the **Draft Water Sharing Plans** for the (April 2011) ;
 - . NSW Border Rivers Unregulated and Alluvial Water Sources
 - . Intersecting Streams Unregulated and Alluvial Water Sources
 - . Groundwater Sources Overlaying the NSW Great Artesian Basin
- the **draft NSW Biodiversity Strategy 2010-2015** (Feb 2011)
- the NSW Office of Water on the **Draft Water Sharing Plans** for the;
 - . Castlereagh River Unregulated and Alluvial Water Sources
 - . Lower Murray-Darling Unregulated and Alluvial Water Sources
 - . Murray Unregulated and Alluvial Water Sources
 - . NSW Murray-Darling Basin Fractured Rock Groundwater Sources
 - . NSW Murray-Darling Basin Porous Rock Groundwater Sources
 - . North-Western Unregulated Water Sources and the North-Western Fractured Rock Groundwater Sources
- the **Senate and House of Representatives Inquiries** related to the Murray-Darling Basin Plan *Guide*, management of the Basin and the provisions of the *Water Act 2007* (C'th) legislation.

Satisfactory acquittal of the Environmental Trust 3-year High Conservation Value Wetlands project was completed early in the financial year. Subsequently, in cooperation with the Nature Conservation Council of NSW ('NCC' - an IRN Member Group), two successful workshops were held in Sydney and Orange under the theme *Basin Plan Talks*. Further IRN workshops are planned for the latter half of 2011 and early 2012 as part of the *Caring for our critical aquatic inland habitat* project, funded through the Federal Caring for Our Country – Community Action Grant program.

The Wilderness Society WildCountry grant provided support for two of our quarterly Newsletters delivering educational content about interconnected inland river, wetland and floodplain systems, progress on their management and how the WildCountry scientific principles relate to this.

NSW Environmental Trust Lead Environmental Community Groups support was invaluable in allowing IRN to meet rent and overheads for a work space within the NPA Office at 5 Wilson St, Newtown.

Support from the Earth Welfare Foundation for work to progress an environmentally sound and scientifically robust Murray-Darling Basin Plan Basin led NPA NSW to commission IRN to undertake this. Accordingly, IRN has been able plan ahead, with an upgrade of Admin Officer position to Coordinator on 4 day/week basis from the start of the 2011-12 financial year.

Looking ahead, IRN there remains much to be done. Subject to new funding being obtained, work on the Basin Plan is likely to remain a key focus through to end of coming financial year, coupled with ongoing educational and network development to build on the legacy of knowledge and experience of IRN's first twenty years.