Annual Report
2017 – 2018

Including reports on:
• Murray Darling Wetlands Working Group Public Fund
• Riverspace
• The Environmental Water Trust


Rehabilitated wetlands: A lasting legacy for local communities to build on and enjoy the benefits that wetlands have to offer
Acknowledgement of Country

The Murray Darling Wetlands Working Group Ltd acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land we work, live and learn on and pays its respects to Elders past, present and future.

Our organisation

The Murray Darling Wetlands Working Group was founded in 1992 as a community-government partnership to restore and conserve wetlands along the Murray and Lower Darling rivers. Since then, the Working Group has pioneered the restoration of wetlands by combining community knowledge, science, old-fashioned common sense and partnerships.

Over the years, the Working Group has become a model of best practice in managing wetlands in the Murray-Darling Basin.

Much of the work was achieved during a significant drought and rapid water reform. In doing so, the Working Group demonstrated that water management and change need not be tarnished by conflict and argument. In recent years, much of the group’s experiences and knowledge have been integrated into the way that state and commonwealth agencies manage their environmental water.

For the first 17 years of its life, the organisation was run by a committee but changed its operations to a company with a board in 2009. Since then it has established a water trust and a balanced fund while also entering the water market. However, community understanding and rehabilitation of wetlands is still its core vision.
## Highlights of 2017-18

**August 2017:** Long-standing chair of the board, Howard Jones, retires.

**August 2017:** New lay-flat piping to improve water delivery into wetlands is purchased direct from China.

**9 September 2017:** The Wetlands Working Group celebrates 25 years since its establishment.

**September 2017:** For the first time, water is delivered on behalf of the Environmental Trust to private properties in northern Victoria.

**September 2017:** The group delivers commonwealth environmental water to wetlands on two properties west of Wentworth.

**November 2017:** The Murray-Darling Basin Balanced Water Fund receives a Banksia Award.

**December 2017:** Ian Davidson is elected chair of the board.

**January 2018:** David Harriss joins the board.

**May 2018:** Management of the Nimmie-Caira property on the Lower Murrumbidgee floodplain is handed over to a consortium comprising The Nature Conservancy Australia, the Nari-Nari Tribal Council, the Murray Darling Wetlands Working Group and the University of NSW.

**December 2017:** Completion of the six-year carbon in wetlands project.

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### Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgement of Country</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our organisation</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highlights of 2017-18</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our vision, mission and goals</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our vision</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our mission</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our values</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our conservation goals</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report from our Chair</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report from our Chief Executive Officer</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our governance</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing our finances</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board meetings</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual General Meeting</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief Executive Officer</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appointments</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our major achievements during the year</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storing carbon in wetlands</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our environmental water trust</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riverspace</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our history</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gayini (Nimmie–Caira)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our awards</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our public fund</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff and stakeholders</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our engagement with key stakeholders</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our employees</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our board members</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board member attendance</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 2</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our awards</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to contact us</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Annual Report 2017-18**

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Our vision, mission and goals

Our vision
Community understanding, caring and rehabilitation of wetland environments.

Our mission
Restoring and improving the management of wetlands in the Murray-Darling Basin by linking community involvement with best scientific understanding.

Our values
Innovation - creative thinking and encouraging opportunities.
Accountability and transparency - responsible and open decision-making and sound financial management.
Equity - appreciation of environmental, social, economic and cultural issues across the Murray-Darling Basin.
Integrity - responsive and reliable in all our actions and respectful of community opinions and issues.
Community focussed - engaging and empowering basin communities in environmental solutions.
Commitment - a community-based organisation committed to wetland restoration.

Our conservation goals
- Promote and implement sound management of Murray-Darling Basin wetlands to optimise their environmental values.
- Promote the sustainable use of wetlands and water resources.
- Specifically, we shall restore and improve the ecological health of floodplain wetlands along the southern Murray-Darling Basin, including the headwaters of the Great Dividing Range; basin floodplains and rain-fed wetlands (not connected to rivers).

We shall achieve these goals by:
- Facilitating greater community awareness of wetland values and management requirements in Murray-Darling Basin wetlands.
- Utilising the latest research and best management practices to protect and restore wetlands.
- Developing functional links with other wetland and river management organisations.
- Encouraging community involvement in cooperative rehabilitation projects of wetlands in cooperation with government agencies and key land managers.
- Identifying sources of funding and seeking sponsorship for implementing wetland programs for basin wetlands.
- Promoting management-oriented research and recognition of research priorities for wetlands throughout the Murray, Murrumbidgee and Lower Darling river catchments.
- Expanding interstate liaison and cooperation by fostering links with other agencies and wetland rehabilitation organisations.
- Recognising the importance of local and regional landscape management and private wetlands, by taking a systems approach.

The blue and brown colours of our logo depict water and land, symbolising the temporary nature of most Australian wetlands.
This is my first year as chair of the Murray Darling Wetlands Working Group and already, it has been an exciting and fulfilling time. I am honoured to have been chosen as the new chair after Howard Jones retired from the position last year. I hope to continue the great leadership that Howard provided and steer the group towards even more sustainability and great projects. Unfortunately, we also felt great sadness in March when staff member, Rhonda Sinclair, passed away from cancer. Rhonda was a strong contributor to the group and her constant cheerfulness and love of life is greatly missed by all of us.

The highlight of the year was the decision by the NSW and federal governments to hand management of the Nimmie-Caira property on the Lower Murrumbidgee floodplain to a consortium comprising The Nature Conservancy Australia, the Nari-Nari Tribal Council, the Murray Darling Wetlands Working Group and the University of NSW. This historic decision was the result of enormous effort over two years from all the consortium and capably led by one of our board directors, Kathy Ridge. I had the opportunity to visit the area recently to catch up with the Nari Nari and begin developing a practical assessment of the vegetation and photo monitoring methods for their staff. It was a great pleasure to work with highly motivated people who share a strong vision for the restoration of this property. I believe the consortium is very well served with having the Nari Nari use their existing knowledge and experience in land management and we are off to a great start on what I’m sure will be rewarding ride.

The year also saw an important milestone in the management of water from our Environmental Water Trust, with the Working Group delivering water to wetlands in Victorian. We also delivered commonwealth environmental water to wetlands in NSW. These events were a result of strong stakeholder involvement and relationships across many agencies and individuals.

I thank Ken and Ann Warren from Wingillie Station where we are preparing to reintroduce the small Murray hardyhead. These native fish are currently extinct in NSW and we are very excited to see how successful this reintroduction will be.

Our six-year partnership project of storing carbon in wetlands with Murray Local Land Services was completed during the year. Just over 3,750 hectares are now under improved management, which was 75 percent more than the set target. That is a tremendous achievement and demonstrates the importance of on-ground rehabilitation works on private properties. My congratulations to all involved.

When they are not in the field doing their work, our staff continue to engage with landholders, Aboriginal communities, government agencies, businesses and researchers across a vast area of NSW and Victoria. Our directors have also been busy, extending their networks and influence across the Murray-Darling Basin. Last year, we bade a fond farewell to one of our long-standing directors, Barrie MacMillan, after five years of service. In February, we welcomed our newest director, David Harriss. One of our newer directors, Adrian Wells, has been busy with the challenging task of writing the history of our group. This is no small accomplishment with over 25 years of archival boxes and meeting minutes to wade through! We look forward to launching the book in November 2018.

My sincere thanks to our staff and directors for continuing to work with commitment and purpose and to all our families for their support and patience!

Ian Davidson
CHAIR
As noted by our chair, the past year has had tremendous highs and lows. Rhonda’s passing is still felt by all of us and in our Albury office that we share with the Petaurus Education Group, where she was a regular and much-loved visitor.

We have had a very busy year for environmental watering in wetlands. For the first time, we delivered water on behalf of the Environmental Trust to private properties in Victoria between September 2017 and May 2018 to improve vegetation and provide aquatic habitat for birds and frogs.

In addition to the trust water, the Murray Darling Wetlands Working Group delivered commonwealth environmental water to Lucerne Day and Wingillie Station wetlands (west of Wentworth) between September 2017 and May 2018. This was to maintain the health of river red gums, lignum and other species, as well as provide habitat for birds and southern bell frog.

Our six-year (2011 to 2017) partnership project with Murray Local Land Services came to a successful completion. Funding was provided by the Australian Government Biodiversity Fund and administered by the former Department of the Environment (now the Department of the Environment and Energy). The total area now under a 10-year management agreement is 3,266 hectares, spread over 43 different sites and 27 properties.

The Gayini (Nimmie-Caira) Project is an exciting new milestone for us. Rehabilitating the wetlands and creeks of this vast area will be one of the world’s largest wetland restoration projects. Coupled with smart management for economic purposes and the management of land and culture by the Traditional Owners, this project is ground-breaking and historic. The Working Group is very pleased to be part of this brighter future for the region and the wetlands.

In November 2017, the Murray-Darling Basin Balanced Water Fund was awarded one of Australia’s premier environment prizes, the Banksia Award, in the natural capital category. Judged by an independent panel of experts, the award ‘recognised demonstrated leadership and excellence in valuing, measuring, managing and investing in Australia’s natural capital with the same rigor that we manage all of society’s capital’.

My sincere thanks to our staff and directors for their tireless and voluntary efforts as well as their constant encouragement. I believe the next 25 years will prove to be just as ground-breaking and interesting as the past 25!

Deborah Nias
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
Our governance

The Murray Darling Wetlands Working Group Ltd. is an Australian Public Company limited by guarantee with the Australian Securities & Investments Commission (Australian Company Number: 137 010 658). The company was registered under the Corporations Act 2001 on 8 May 2009. The Wetlands Working Group is governed by a board of 12 directors with experience in water and natural resource management; farming; irrigation; community engagement; legal; finance; economic; science; and governance. As at 30 June 2018, the board comprised the following directors:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>POSITION</th>
<th>BACKGROUND</th>
<th>DATE APPOINTED</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mr Ian Davidson Wangaratta VIC</td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>Natural resource management</td>
<td>2017</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ms Kathryn Ridge Sydney NSW</td>
<td>Deputy Chair</td>
<td>Lawyer</td>
<td>2012</td>
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<td>Mr Howard Jones Dareton NSW</td>
<td>Immediate past chair</td>
<td>Irrigator</td>
<td>2012</td>
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<td>Mrs Judith Frankenberg Howlong NSW</td>
<td>Board member</td>
<td>Beef farmer, botanist</td>
<td>2012</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr Michael Maher Canberra ACT</td>
<td>Board member</td>
<td>Natural resource manager specialist</td>
<td>2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr John Pettigrew Shepparton VIC</td>
<td>Board member</td>
<td>Irrigation and dairy industry (retired)</td>
<td>2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr David Harriss PSM Narooma NSW</td>
<td>Board member</td>
<td>Public service (water and natural resource management)</td>
<td>2018</td>
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<td>Dr Ben Gawne Bethanga VIC</td>
<td>Board member</td>
<td>Aquatic ecologist</td>
<td>2012</td>
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<td>Mr Nick Lilley Melbourne VIC</td>
<td>Board member</td>
<td>Financial specialist</td>
<td>2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr Adrian Wells Leneva VIC</td>
<td>Board member</td>
<td>Education, community engagement, communication</td>
<td>2016</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The board inspects watering at Yambuna Lagoon in northern Victoria
Board meetings

Four ordinary board meetings were held during 2017-18. The number of meetings and attendance by each of the company’s directors are set out in Appendix 1.

Annual General Meeting

The company’s annual general meeting was held in Albury on 22 November 2017.

Chief Executive Officer

Dr Deborah Nias continued as the company’s Chief Executive Officer during the year. In 2017 Dr Nias was elected as the board’s company secretary

Managing our finances

The Murray Darling Wetlands Working Group is a company limited by guarantee and must adhere to stringent governance and reporting procedures. The Working Group has a strong financial governance system in place that includes:

- A Finance Audit Risk and Governance Committee comprising three board members skilled in financial management. The committee reviews financial reports quarterly, ensures accountability for project expenditure, has an internal audit process, and oversees the independent financial audit.
- Working Group policies govern the use of all funds.
- The Working Group engages and independent external bookkeeper to maintain account records, reports BAS, controls payroll and liaises with the auditor.
- The Working Group is independently audited each year.

Appointments

- During the year, Mr Barrie MacMillan retired as company secretary and from the board after five years of service.
- In August 2017, Mr Howard Jones retired as the company’s chair after eight years. Howard Jones was also chair of the Murray Wetlands Working Group committee from 1995 to 2009.
- During the board’s first meeting of 2018, Mr Ian Davidson was elected chair of the board.

The Murray Darling Wetlands Working Group Public Fund reports annually to the Department of the Environment and Energy, detailing how money (and/or property) donated to the Public Fund is used, and how this contributes to the Wetlands Working Group’s principal purpose.

During 2017-18, members of the Finance Audit Risk and Governance Committee were Mr Barrie MacMillan, Mrs Judith Frankenberg Ms Kathryn Ridge Mr Nick Lilley. Their attendance at meetings is set out in Appendix 2.

The annual accounts are not included in the annual report but copies of audited annual financial statements are available to relevant organisations upon request.
Our major achievements during the year
Storing carbon in wetlands

Final outcomes and achievements far exceeded the original aims

This six-year project to store carbon in wetlands concluded in 2017. Project funding was provided by the Australian Government Biodiversity Fund and administered by the Department of the Environment and Energy. The project was a joint initiative of the Working group and Murray Local Land Services. The overall aim of this project was to deliver 2,000 hectares of rehabilitated wetlands. However, the final outcomes and achievements far exceeded the original aims.

Wetlands provide the largest storage of carbon on earth and can store up to 40 times more carbon than forests. The aim of the project was to rehabilitate degraded wetlands and increase their capacity for carbon storage as well as maintain and enhance their biodiversity.

Just over 3,750 hectares were rehabilitated and are now under a 10-year management agreement that are registered on land titles. These included 43 sites across 27 different properties with diverse wetlands between Albury and Barham, Henty and Jerilderie. Just over 54 kilometres of fencing was erected to protect direct seeded plants and tubestock, a total of 160,244 plants. Thirteen alternative stock watering points were installed along with 86 interpretive signs, six bird hides and two-and-a-half kilometres of walking tracks. The project also included the development of outdoor classrooms, and educational worksheet, 12 formal presentations, media interviews, 19 community events, and numerous fact sheets, articles, wetland plant guides, four student-written books, and a journal paper.

Above: Launching a book about wetlands written by students of Rand Public School
Below: Wetlands Working Group project officer, Sarah Ning, inspecting one of the Murray wetland carbon storage sites.
Our environmental water trust

First in Australia dedicated to improving social, ecological and cultural outcomes for wetlands

In 2014, the Wetlands Working Group and The Nature Conservancy (Australia) launched the Environmental water Trust to attract private donations to buy and deliver environmental water to wetlands and rivers across the Murray-Darling Basin. The trust’s vision is to allocate water to secure the best environmental, social, cultural and economic outcomes by replicating natural wetting and drying phases of basin wetlands. The priorities are wetlands of high conservation value that are located on private land and which are not targeted by existing state or federal government environmental watering plans.

A year later the Wetlands Working Group, The Nature Conservancy (Australia) and Kilter Rural Pty Ltd launched the Murray-Darling Basin Balanced Water Fund, also the first of its kind in Australia. The balanced fund aims to acquire water entitlements for wetland rehabilitation and trade water back into agriculture. Investors can invest in wetland conservation works while also investing in the Australian water market. The fund is underpinned by specific financial, environmental, cultural and social objectives and is managed by Kilter Rural. A 10-year agreement gives the Environmental Water Trust access to water and money raised by Murray-Darling Basin Balanced Water Fund. The trust’s watering objectives include providing Aboriginal social and cultural benefits using evidence-based approaches.

2017-18 year

The Annual Environmental Water Plan for 2017-18 was accepted by the Environmental Water Trust in June 2017 for implementation in the 2017-18 year. Activities included the first watering in Victoria by the company and watering in NSW in collaboration with the Commonwealth Environmental Water Office. The company received its first water donation from the Trust in August 2017.

This environmental watering was a collaborative effort between the Commonwealth Environmental Water Office, Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority, Goulburn Murray Water, Hazel L Henry Farmland Nature Refuges, Murray Darling Wetlands Working Group, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, NSW Office of Environment and Heritage, Parks Victoria, Tar-Ru Lands Board of Management Maraura Traditional Owners, The Nature Conservancy, Australia, SA Water and landholders on which the wetlands were located.

Wingillie and Lucerne Day

Wingillie Station is a not-for-profit private conservation reserve (the Hazel L Henry Farmland Nature Refuges), situated on an old sheep station west of Wentworth. In 2017, work started to transform the property’s degraded wetlands by applying environmental water. Semi-permanent and intermittent wetlands on both Wingillie Station and the adjoining Lucerne Day property supported a range of native plants and animals including waterbirds and the endangered Southern bell frog. However, regulation and infrastructure had resulted in a decrease in the frequency, magnitude and duration of flood events along the Murray River. Up until 2016, most of wetlands in the region had received no water for many years, resulting in a deterioration of environmental health. Natural flooding in the spring of 2016 resulted in an improvement of floodplain health. The 2017 watering aimed to capitalise on some improvements in bird, vegetation and animal breeding and to continue the rehabilitation process.
The watering event was another ‘first’ for the Wetlands Working Group as it was the first time that the group worked with a private land trust and was the first time the land trust had worked with the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder. The local engagement officer with the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder, Richard Minterns, was pivotal in creating that initial partnership. Managing the actual watering was a partnership between the landowners, the Wetlands Working Group, the Commonwealth Environmental Water Office and the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage. The aim was to deliver environmental water to five wetland complexes on Wingillie Station and Lucerne Day. Watering began in early-October involving two pumps and gravity feed systems to deliver 105 megalitres of water each day on both properties. Some of the water was channelled through recently rehabilitated irrigation infrastructure that was first installed in 1930.

The impacts of the watering on both properties varied. River Red gum and Black box trees showed an improvement in crown density. Lignum plants also showed improved health and an increase in the percentage of plants as did aquatic species. Over 40 waterbird species were recorded across the wetlands peaking in January when the majority of the wetlands were full or just starting to dry. Waterbird numbers peaked in March when many of the wetlands had reduced water levels providing a range of habitats from exposed mudflats, shallow water to deep water. The wetlands provided suitable foraging habitat for a range of waterbirds including: ducks, cormorants, herons, rails, waders and terns.

Southern bell frogs were recorded from five of the ten wetlands watered on Wingillie Station.

First use of the trust’s own water

In August 2017, environmental trust received its first water donation from the Murray-Darling Basin Balanced Water Fund which was used on the privately-owned Yambuna wetland, east of Echuca in northern Victoria. The watering resulted from a relationship between the landowner, the Working Group, Victoria’s Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority, Parks Victoria, the Victorian Environmental Water Holder and Goulburn Murray Water. The 11-hectare nationally significant wetland is situated mostly on private property on the Goulburn River floodplain. It was the first time the lagoon had received an environmental watering of 57 megalitres to help restore its environmental health.

The watering of lagoon resulted in 29 plant species being identified within the riverine swamp and 27 species in the riverine swamp forest, including the threatened river swamp wallaby-grass. The number of waterbirds increased during the water delivery, peaking in late November. Four threatened species were recorded on Yambuna Lagoon during the event - Eastern great egret, Royal spoonbill, White-bellied sea-eagle and Azure kingfisher.

Southern bell frogs - Female (L) and Male (R) (Credit: David Paul/Museums Victoria)

Yellow-billed spoonbill and Eastern great egret at the Yambuna Lagoon (Credit: Natalie Holland)
In May 2018, the Wetlands Working Group Ltd developed its annual watering program for the trust for the 2018-19 year. Under the plan (which can vary according to the season) 2,285 megalitres of environmental water has been allocated to five wetland sites, three in Victoria and two in New South Wales.

In Victoria, they are:
- 11-hectare Yambuna wetland on the Lower Goulburn River (100 megalitres)
- O’Kanes three-hectare wetland near Yarrawonga (50 megalitres)
- 168-hectare Red Gum Swamp near Kerang (741 megalitres).

In NSW, the recommended watering sites were:
- Wingillie Station (1,310 megalitres)
- Eight-hectare Yadabal Lagoon in the Werai Forest (84 megalitres).

Watering Yadabal Lagoon and Red Gum Swamp will involve working with Traditional Owners.

In addition, three new wetland complexes in Victoria have been identified for watering if circumstances permit. These ‘backup sites’ will either replace other sites that cannot be watered or become additional sites to use any remaining water.
Riverspace

A place for wetlands, rivers and people

In 2014, the Wetlands Working Group and the Australian River Restoration Centre established an new interactive website called Riverspace. The aim was to showcase the significance of Australia's inland waterways and wetlands in a format that was easily accessible by the general community. It was believed that because the two groups were not-for-profit and independent, they could provide information about Australia’s wetlands free from many bureaucratic and political constraints other agencies must operate under. There was, and still is, no equivalent website in Australia that combines and presents research and practical information on rivers and wetlands alongside other waterway activities.

By 2017, there were nearly 140 stories on the website, contributed by 29 different organisations. Riverspace analysis showed that during 2017-18, an average 650 visitors viewed the website each month. There are now 139 stories on Riverspace from 19 different organisations. The top five stories for the year were ‘Ponde’ the Murray Cod – River Creator; Wonga Wetlands; Glenelg River Restoration Project; Dharriwaa: The Narran Lakes; and True Tales – Aboriginal Fisheries Management. Current sponsors of the site are the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage and Murray Local Land Services. Over the past few months, the Working Group has been working with WebMatrix, the company hosting Riverspace, to make some design changes to the website. These include new images on the home page, simplified categories, and larger font. The changes are due to go live shortly and will result in better functionality and a fresh look for the site. A social media campaign to promote the ‘new look’ is planned. However, due to a lack of capacity within Working Group, the Australian River Restoration Centre took over managing Riverspace until the end of 2017. There are plans to boost social media engagement and promote our sponsors' stories, encouraging more traffic to the website.

Our history

A celebration of the importance of wetlands in the Murray-Darling Basin

During the year, board member, Adrian Wells, continued compiling the history of the Wetlands Working Group to help celebrate our 25-year history. The story is not only documenting how the group pioneered the restoration of wetlands but how much of the group's experiences and knowledge have been integrated into the way that state and commonwealth agencies manage their environmental water. It will also detail how new ideas on managing water need not be tarnished by conflict and argument.

The book’s title, Against the Flow, reflects what is possible in bringing people together to improve the Murray-Darling Basin’s land, water and cultural resources. The book is also a celebration of the importance of wetlands in the Murray-Darling Basin. It highlights how rehabilitating these numerous, but often misunderstood, environmental assets can bring social, economic, environmental and cultural benefits to communities that live and work along rivers. The book will be launched in November 2018.
Gayini (Nimmie-Caira)

A once-in-a-generation opportunity

One of the first recorded attempts to conserve wetlands in the Murray-Darling Basin was in the late-1800s when communities tried to protect the Lower Murrumbidgee floodplain between Balranald and Hay. The landholders, local councils, engineers and consultants argued that the Murrumbidgee River should be managed to maintain harmony between irrigation and environmental interests and that floodplain wetlands should not be sacrificed in expectations that irrigation would create wealth elsewhere. However, their efforts were mostly ignored.

Since that decision, a great deal of work has been undertaken on the environmental and cultural significance of the area, particularly since 1990. The area is now regarded as representing some of the more diverse systems in the Murray-Darling Basin and is listed in the directory of important wetlands of Australia. It includes large areas of continuous lignum and River Red gum forests, Black box woodlands and semi-arid shrublands. The area supports endangered plant and animal species, has the largest known population of the endangered Southern bell frog in NSW, and includes some of the most extensive waterbird breeding colonies in Australia. The area is also of high cultural, spiritual and economic importance to the local traditional custodians.

A substantial part of this floodplain was Nimmie-Caira. By 2018, these 85,000 hectares of crown land, were held by the NSW Water Administration Ministerial Council. In May 2018, the Murray Darling Wetlands Working Group was part of a successful consortium chosen by the Commonwealth and New South Wales governments to manage the Nimmie-Caira area. The consortium included The Nature Conservancy (Australia), the Nari Nari Tribal Council, the Centre for Ecosystem Science (University of NSW) and the Wetlands Working Group. The Working Group will contribute to the future management of the wetlands and floodplains, some of which lie on the same area that was a focus for protection by communities in the late-1800s. The 10-year project aims to not only implement land and water management plans but to eventually return the leased property to full ownership by the traditional custodians. On 1 July 2018, the consortium took over the lease of the property under the Nature Conservation Water Fund Pty Ltd, of which two-thirds is owned by the Wetlands Working Group.

Not only does the project represent a unique opportunity to sustainably manage a vast area of the largest remaining wetland habitats in the Murrumbidgee catchment, but it acknowledged the skills and expertise of the Wetlands Working Group developed since 1992. It also acknowledges the cultural heritage and traditional knowledge of the local Nari Nari people. As such, the area will now be known as Gayini (Nimmie-Caira). The project represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to create a new, sustainably managed and financed conservation property for the benefit of people and nature.

The vision for the area is for the traditional custodians of the Nimmie-Caira lands to be instrumental in healing the land and waters, which in turn heals its people, so they can enjoy culturally, socially and economically sustainable and fulfilling lives.
Our awards

In November 2017, the Murray-Darling Basin Balanced Water Fund received Australia’s premier environment prize, a Banksia Award. The award recognised leadership and excellence in valuing, measuring, managing and investing in Australia’s natural capital with the same rigor that all of society’s capital is managed. The award was shared between the Wetlands Working Group, The Nature Conservancy in Australia, and Kilter Rural.

On Australia Day 2018, retiring chair of the Wetlands Working Group, Howard Jones, was awarded Environmentalist of the Year Award by the Wentworth Shire Council for his long-term leadership of the Working Group and his active commitment to improving the health of the Murray and Lower Darling rivers.

Our public fund

The Murray Darling Wetlands Working Group Ltd. operates the Murray Darling Wetlands Working Group Public Fund. This Fund was established in May 2014 and is registered with the Register of Environmental Organisation (administered by the Australian Government Department of the Environment and Energy). The Register of Environmental Organisations is a Commonwealth tax deductibility scheme for environmental organisations enabled under Income Tax Assessment Act 1997. It allows eligible organisations to be endorsed as Deductible Gift Recipients by the Australian Taxation Office. As such, donations to the Fund are tax deductible for the donor.

To be eligible for entry to the Register of Environmental Organisations, organisations must have a principal purpose of either:

- the protection and enhancement of the natural environment or of a significant aspect of the natural environment; or

- the provision of information or education, or the carrying on of research, about the natural environment or a significant aspect of the natural environment.

The Public Fund assets are used solely to support the Wetlands Working Group’s environmental purposes. The Murray Darling Wetlands Working Group Ltd reports annually to the Department of the Environment and Energy, detailing how money (and/or property) donated to the Public Fund has been used, and how this contributes to the Wetlands Working Group’s principal purpose.

How to contribute to the fund

There are two ways to donate to the Murray Darling Wetlands Working Group Public Fund:

Electrotonic fund transfer

Donations can be made direct to the Murray Darling Wetlands Working Group Public Fund bank account via EFT. All quoted dollar amounts and transactions are processed as Australian currency ($AUD). Simply transfer your 100% tax-deductible donation ($2 or more) to:

Bank: Westpac, Mitcham SA
Account Name: Murray Darling Wetlands Working Group Public Fund
BSB: 035 044
Account Number: 182352

Please use your surname as the reference. For a tax-deductible receipt, please email your name and postal address details to: debnias@murraydarlingwetlands.com.au

Cheque

To donate by cheque or postal order, make the cheque/postal order payable to Murray Darling Wetlands Working Group Public Fund and post to:

Murray Darling Wetlands Working Group Public Fund
PO Box 7016
East Albury NSW 2640
Staff and stakeholders
Our engagement with key stakeholders

During the year, the company was supported in its work by the following stakeholders and supporters. We thank them for their valued advice, help and encouragement during 2017-18:

- Australian River Restoration Centre – Canberra, ACT
- Barapa Barapa/Perrepa Perrapa People
- Berrigan Shire Council – Berrigan, NSW
- Bottle Bend Trust Reserve
- Charles Sturt University – Thuringowa, NSW
- Commonwealth Environmental Water Office – Canberra, ACT
- Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder – Canberra
- Corowa District Landcare Group – Corowa, NSW
- Dja Dja Wurrung Nation
- Federation Shire Council – Corowa, NSW
- Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority – Shepparton, VIC
- Goulburn Murray Water – Tatura, VIC
- Hazel L. Henry Farmland Nature Refuges (Wingillie Station) – NSW
- International River Foundation
- Jamie McMaster (Yambuna Lagoon landholder) – Shepparton, VIC
- Kilter Rural
- La Trobe University – Wodonga, VIC
- Lucerne Day – Wentworth, NSW
- Murray Darling Basin Authority – Canberra, ACT
- Murray Local Land Services – Deniliquin, NSW
- Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations
- Nari Nari Tribal Council
- North Central Catchment Management Authority – Bendigo, VIC
- North East Catchment Management Authority – Wodonga, VIC
- NSW Department of Primary Industries: Fisheries
- NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service
- NSW Office of Environment and Heritage
- Parks Victoria
- Petaurus Education Group Inc – Albury, NSW
- Rotary Group of Corowa – Corowa, NSW
- SA Water – Adelaide, SA
- Tar-Ru Lands Board of Management
- The Nature Conservancy Australia – Melbourne, VIC
- The Nature Conservancy Global – USA
- The Environmental Water Trust
- Trust for Nature
- University of NSW – Sydney, NSW
- Victorian Environmental Water Holder – Melbourne, VIC
- Water for Nature SA – Adelaide, SA
- Water NSW
- Water Stewardship Australia
- Wentworth Shire Council – Wentworth, NSW
- Western Local Land Services – Gol Gol, NSW
- Wetlands Alliance
- Yarkuwa Indigenous Knowledge Centre – Deniliquen, NSW

The company also thanks the many private landholders without whom we could not have achieved what we did during the year.

Don Hearn from Restdown Wines received funding to re-design and install interpretive signs for the Restdown Living Heritage Trail
Our employees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>POSITION</th>
<th>DATE APPOINTED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dr Deborah Nias</td>
<td>Chief Executive Officer</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs Sarah Ning</td>
<td>Project officer – Albury</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr Susanne Watkins</td>
<td>Contractor – Albury</td>
<td>2014 - 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Rick Webster</td>
<td>Senior Environmental Water Manager – Deniliquin</td>
<td>2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Ali Borrell</td>
<td>Project Officer – Albury</td>
<td>2018</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Vale Rhonda Sinclair

In 2018, Rhonda Sinclair passed away after a long fight with cancer. Rhonda joined the company as a member of staff in 2013 and developed the governance and operating procedures required of the company as well as managing its projects and communication. She was also asked to manage the trust’s first watering project in 2016.

Using skills and networks developed in previous jobs, Sinclair undertook all of the planning and oversaw the watering and monitoring activities. This challenging and very successful task was significant in establishing the group’s credibility as a responsible environmental water manager with a new range of partners. Rhonda’s management of this watering was her greatest legacy to the group.

Staff and Board Members visit Nimmie-Caira
Our board members

The directors of Murray Darling Wetlands Working Group Ltd. are experienced and dedicated members of the community. They include scientists, landholders, lawyers and conservationists. Their depth of experience, technical skills and networks is used to guide and manage the Working Group's strategic activities.

Ian Davidson's background and extensive experience in natural resource management means he has plenty to offer the Working Group. Since 2002, he has run an independent environmental consultancy company in north-east Victoria, identifying conservation values and assisting land managers to maintain and enhance the environment and those undertaking various research projects. His clients include local, state and commonwealth governments. Originally a fisherman, Davidson's work has included wildlife management issues, research on remnant vegetation and recovery of endangered native birds. He has also worked with Greening Australia, running one of the first fencing incentive programs in Australia.

Howard Jones has chaired the organisation from 1996 to 2017. Jones was born in Victoria's Wimmera and started work as a telephone technician. In 1980, he bought a small irrigated vineyard at Coomealla in southwest NSW. He enjoyed hunting and fishing, quietly observing the state of wetlands, lakes and dams and becoming aware of salinity and other environmental issues. Jones became a very successful grape grower and was a founding director of Western Murray Irrigation. His main occupation is currently as a viticulturist but over 40 years he has served on local, state and federal natural resource management committees sharing his extensive understanding and knowledge of irrigation, wetlands and river management.

Nick Lilley is a corporate finance professional with over a decade of experience in raising capital for renewable energy projects in Australia and internationally. He has experience in the impact investment sector, having worked on the development of the Murray Darling Basin Balanced Water Fund. Lilley's focus is on the renewable energy and conservation sectors.

Judy Frankenberg is the group's longest serving member and has been involved with the group since its first meeting in 1992. A scientist with expertise in floodplain and wetland management (and also a farmer at Howlong), Frankenberg maintained her involvement with the group because she saw it as such a worthwhile thing. In 2013, she explained that being involved with the group gave her great opportunity to make a difference and actually do something, not just talk or write about things. Until early-2018, Frankenberg served as deputy chair of the company.

Dr Ben Gawne, a freshwater ecologist, is well placed to contribute to the scientific understandings behind the decisions made by the Working Group. He has been a member of the Working Group's executive since 2002 understands all too well the problems faced by Australia's wetlands. In 2002 he took on the Albury-based position of director of The Murray-Darling Freshwater Research Centre. Gawne has been a member of the Commonwealth Environmental Water Office, Environmental Water Scientific Advisory Panel. He has retired from the freshwater research centre and now works at University of Canberra.

Dr Mike Maher retired from the NSW Government following a 40-year career spanning research, policy and management of inland wetlands. This career provided opportunities to witness wetlands and their inhabitants across a diverse range of climatic conditions. Maher was instrumental in establishing many wetland reserves in western NSW by combining an understanding of the ecological values of each reserve and developing a trusting relationship with the relevant landholders.

Kathy Ridge has a long association with wetlands and water quality. Raised in New Guinea, Ridge developed a life-long...
commitment to protecting and conserving culture and nature. She began her career as a water micro-biologist but gained a law degree and started working with Aboriginal elders to protect parts of coastal NSW from mining. In 1999, as Executive Officer of the Nature Conservation Council of NSW, Ridge began to take a more active interest in inland wetlands and rivers, through member groups Inland Rivers Network and the Coasts and Wetlands Society. She is currently the principal of Ridge and Associates, a legal firm in Sydney with a strong interest in environmental issues.

Adrian Wells recently retired after 46 years of work in the Murray-Darling Basin in horticultural research and extension; the media; community development; rural education; and Local Government. As part of his jobs, Adrian served on various local, state and commonwealth natural resource management committees and working parties.

John Pettigrew has a long history within the Goulburn Valley fruit industry as a grower and director of SPC Ltd. He served on various industry advisory boards and water service committees. In 2002, Pettigrew was appointed to the board of Goulburn-Murray Water. He has a keen interest in the environment and resource management and has extensive water policy experience.

David Harriss accepted an invitation to join the board after a long and distinguished career in the NSW public service. In 1989, Harriss was offered a position as a resource manager in south western NSW. He had completed a post-graduate qualification in water management during which he had studied, and had (in his own words) ‘become a little fascinated by wetlands’. He was the first chair of the Murray Wetlands Working Group between 1992 and 1995. At the same time, he rose through the key land and water agency in NSW to become the head of the NSW Office of Water. He retired in 2017 and became a consultant.

Board member attendance

The number of board meetings and attendance by each of the company’s directors are set out below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIRECTOR</th>
<th>ATTENDED</th>
<th>HELD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mr Howard Jones</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Barrie MacMillan</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Judith Frankenberg</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr Ben Gawne</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Kathryn Ridge</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Ian Davidson</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Michael Maher</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Adrian Wells</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr John Pettigrew</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Nick Lilley</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr David Harriss</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The number of Finance, Audit, Risk and Governance Committee meetings and attendance by each of the company’s directors are set out below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIRECTOR</th>
<th>ATTENDED</th>
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</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mr Barrie MacMillan</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>Ms Judith Frankenberg</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Ms Kathryn Ridge</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Nick Lilley</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Howard Jones, chair of the Working Group’s board from 2012 to 2017
Since 1992, the Murray Darling Wetlands Working Group has received numerous awards. Below are some of the more significant awards made to the group and its individuals.

1995: **NSW RiverCare 2000 Silver Award** – presented by the NSW Government in recognition of the Working Group’s Moira Lake wetland rehabilitation project.

2001: **NSW RiverCare 2000 Diamond Award** – presented to Wetlands Working Group member, Vin Byrne, in recognition of his contribution to healthy river environments.

2002: The Working Group was a finalist in the **Theiss Services National Riverprize**. This national award recognised excellent work by community groups in managing and restoring rivers and waterways.

2007: Awarded in recognition of its achievements, particularly the project to water wetlands on private property, the Working Group won the prestigious **National Riverprize**.

2009: The Global Restoration Network awarded the Wetlands Working Group a place in the **Top 25 Australasian Ecological Restoration Projects** for its project of watering wetlands on private property.

2011: Chief Executive Officer of the Wetlands Working Group, Deb Nias, was awarded a **Churchill Fellowship** to investigate water trusts in the United States of America.

2015: The Wetlands Working Group agreed to purchase one of seven Australasian Bittern naming rights to support tracking the birds in memory of Working Group member, Vin Byrnes. Tracking the bird will hopefully determine where it lives in the non-breeding season.

2017: In November 2017, the Wetlands Working Group received Australia’s **Banksia Award** in recognition of leadership in valuing, measuring, managing and investing in Australia’s natural capital. The award was shared between the Working Group, The Nature Conservancy Australia and Kilter Rural.

2018: Retiring chair of the Wetlands Working Group, Howard Jones, was awarded **Environmentalist of the Year Award** by the Wentworth Shire Council on Australia Day.
How to contact us

Dr Deborah Nias - Chief Executive Officer
Email: debnias@murraydarlingwetlands.com.au
Mobile: 0417 287 651

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Studio 1 (behind Adamshurst)
603 David Street,
Albury NSW 2640

Postal Address
PO Box 7016,
East Albury NSW 2640

Registered Business Office
491 Smollett Street,
Albury NSW 2640

ABN
50 137 010 658

Auditor
WHK Albury, NSW

Insurance Policies
Association Liability Insurance, Voluntary Workers Insurance and Public Liability Insurance.

Charitable status
The Murray Darling Wetlands Working Group Ltd. is considered a not-for-profit organisation by the Australian Taxation Office (ATO). The Murray Darling Wetlands Working Group Ltd. is also registered with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) as a Charity. It has Deductible Gift Recipient Status (DGR) and is registered on the Australian Commonwealth Government Register of Environmental Organisations. It has a Board of Directors and Members from the wider community, including scientists, landholders and conservationists.

www.murraydarlingwetlands.com.au