

## RiverConnect Community Program

*A collaborative agency and community approach to management of the Goulburn and Broken Rivers*

Shepparton-Mooroopna, Goulburn Valley, Victoria



**GOULBURN  
BROKEN**  
CATCHMENT  
MANAGEMENT  
AUTHORITY



### Key Messages

- For over 10 years, RiverConnect has led initiatives that help the community connect with nature and recognise the recreational, environmental and cultural value of rivers.
- The Goulburn and Broken Rivers supply water critical to sustaining the Goulburn Valley region's economy, community and way of life.
- Maintaining availability of supply for agriculture, industry and urban use whilst protecting environmental assets from further degradation requires diligent water management governance.
- Stormwater runoff from urban areas, particularly litter and sediment, negatively impacts the Broken and Goulburn Rivers and downstream users.

### Project Overview

Rivers within the Goulburn Valley region are highly valued for a range of reasons: irrigation, industry, potable water supply, stock and domestic water supply, recreation (both passive and active), aesthetic beauty, and biodiversity.

RiverConnect is a partnership program between land management agencies, stakeholders and community. It is a network that includes many partners who use, manage, or are responsible for, the river environment.

The creation of RiverConnect was driven by the desire to develop a strong sense of belonging and connection to the local rivers and a more cohesive approach to river management. RiverConnect aspires to see the Goulburn and Broken River environments recognised as the life and soul of river communities.

RiverConnect is working in a complex area; effective management requires high levels of collaboration and co-operation to achieve better environmental, economic and social outcomes for the river and the community. The partnership model of RiverConnect has been at the heart of its success by enabling community and agencies to come together to identify and action shared priorities.

### Organisations

RiverConnect is a community-agency partnership program co-funded by the Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority (GB CMA) and Greater Shepparton City Council (GSCC). The program has many partners, and is supported by the GSCC Sustainability and Environment Branch. The Implementation Advisory Committee (IAC) is made up of representatives from partner land management agencies, community organisations and the general community, and guides the implementation of the program.



## Objectives

The purpose of RiverConnect is to nurture the community's respect and use of the rivers and wetlands.

The vision of RiverConnect will be achieved by realising long-term goals that increase:

- access to,
- awareness of,
- participation in, and
- care of

the river environment and its cultural heritage.



## Outcomes

Over its first ten years, the dynamic concept of RiverConnect has supported a raft of existing and new alliances. These partnerships resulted in activities that inspired the community to increase their appreciation and custodianship of the river as a social, economic, environmental, educational and cultural asset.

The RiverConnect IAC led the implementation of the first RiverConnect Strategic Plan (2011-2016). The actions put in place through that Plan have yielded a range of significant benefits. These include a vibrant educational program, land managers working more closely together to improve the health of the river environment, exciting activities that engaged more of the community with the river and further opportunities for the Aboriginal community to recognise, record and share their ancient and ongoing relationship with the waterways.

The renewed RiverConnect Strategic Plan (2017-2022) continues to provide a high level, integrated strategy to guide the activities of the RiverConnect partners. This will ensure a co-ordinated approach to enhancing the environmental, cultural, recreational and economic value of the rivers and will ensure that the available funds are directed to achieve the greatest possible benefit.

RiverConnect has been pivotal in the growing appreciation of the significance of the river environments. The rivers are a vital artery, supplying water for homes, irrigation, food processing, industry and gardens. It provides a key wildlife corridor from the mountains to the Murray and important habitat for threatened native species. The river environments have significant cultural heritage importance for Aboriginal people. They also provide the community with an opportunity to interact with the natural world through passive and active recreation, improving health and wellbeing, and adding to the liveability and visitor experience of Greater Shepparton.

Community input and involvement has been one of the strengths of the RiverConnect program to date. In order to ensure that the development of the RiverConnect program continues to be focussed on meeting the community's needs and preferences, an advisory committee of representatives from key agencies, community organisations and the general community will be used to guide implementation of the strategic plan.

## Lessons Learnt

- It is important to have the program ethos embedded within high levels of partner organisations.
- Equality is vital in partnerships.
- The river environments provide key points of connection for urban populations with nature leading to more active lifestyles better physical and mental health and reduced cost on health system.
- The strength of partnership programs lies in identifying value-add opportunities and holding each other accountable.
- Appropriate resourcing significantly improves outcomes, particularly staff, project implementation and ongoing costs.

## More Information

For more information visit the resource library on the Clearwater website <https://www.clearwater.asn.au>

## Contact

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