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MEDIA RELEASE

NSW Rivers chosen as examples of best practice in global report

Three Northern NSW river management projects have been selected as examples of best practice by a global report, which calls for urgent action to save the world's rivers, the majority of which are 'dying or endangered' due to 200 years of neglect.

River Heroes - Lessons from Thiess Riverprize winners and finalists 1999 - 2006 will be launched by the International Riverfoundation (IRF) on Tuesday 4 September at the 10th International Riversymposium & Environmental Flows Conference in Brisbane.

The report showcases the extraordinary efforts of people to save rivers in Australia and around the world, featuring 13 case studies, including the three from NSW, of National and International Thiess Riverprize winners and finalists and the lessons learnt from their best practice.

International Riverfoundation Chair, Martin Albrecht, said NSW should be proud to have such forward-thinking people who acted before crisis point to save its waterways and whose projects will serve as a model for global best practice in river management.

"The River Heroes report groups the case studies into categories and identifies five key elements which are essential for best practice river management: partnerships and collaboration; community mobilisation; a holistic approach; planning, evaluation and monitoring; and an emphasis on long-term sustainability", Mr Albrecht said.

"All three NSW projects demonstrate these elements and are to be especially recognised as excellent collaborative and community-focused ventures."

Lake Macquarie is showcased as an excellent example of restoring a waterway through a holistic approach which takes into account environmental, social and economic needs. The Improvement Project was a finalist for the National and International Thiess Riverprize categories in 2006 and 2007.

Widespread community concerns in the 1980s on the lake's poor water quality led to the establishment of the Office of the Lake Macquarie and Catchment Coordinator to garner support from the community and business sector for the restoration of its wetlands.

The office assisted in the implementation of the Environmental Management Systems and educated the community on the benefits of a healthy lake.

Support from the local business sectors, environmental groups and the community resulted in improvements in water quality, urban amenities and lifestyles, increased tourist numbers, high property values and an environmentally conscious urban community.

The Wallis Lake has been used as another example of best practice due to its successful planning, evaluation and monitoring initiatives.

The Wallis Lake Catchment Management Plan, winner of the 2004 National Thiess Riverprize, was established because the lake faced a serious Hepatitis A contamination event during late 1997, threatening the state's tourism, oyster farming and fishery industries.

Representatives from the state and local government agencies, industry groups and the local community worked together to manage the natural resource of the watershed effectively, improve water quality, repair acid soil landscapes and improve fish migration.

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The Tweed Shire Council has been praised for its emphasis on long-term sustainability.

In 1992, the Tweed River faced poor agricultural and urban land use practices, reduced water quality, stream bank erosion and weed infestation. This prompted the Tweed Shire Council to educate the community and local government on the importance of river management.

The efforts of the council to foster relationships with visionary stakeholders, research organisations and universities led to the Tweed Catchment becoming widely recognised as a source of leading research and practice in fields such as acid sulphate soil and coastal wetland hydrology.

The Tweed River Project was a finalist for the National Thiess Riverprize in 2001, 2003 and 2005.

River Heroes - Lessons from Thiess Riverprize winners and finalists 1999 – 2006 concludes by detailing urgent future actions to ensure the health and sustainability of our river systems.

“We need to introduce a progressive, stepped change within governments and societies that leads us from 200 years of taking rivers for granted and competing for rivers’ resources, to developing a new relationship towards rivers and effective agreements and processes for natural resource use”, the report states.

Martin Albrecht said for better or worse the urgent issues of water scarcity and climate change are pushing us to rethink how we can ensure a habitable planet for future generations.

“Now more than ever before it is imperative to promote and reward projects that improve river health which is why IRF is proud to fund the National and International Thiess Riverprizes”, he said.

The IRF report will be available for download from 4th September at www.riverfoundation.org.au.

The National and International Thiess Riverprizes, which reward groundbreaking river management projects from a prize pool of AU\$400,000, are a partnership between the International Riverfoundation (IRF) and *Riverfestival*, an annual 10 day celebration of Brisbane’s river, people, culture and environment. The prize money is funded by the IRF and the awards are managed by *Riverfestival*.

The 2007 winners will be announced at a gala event on the evening of Tuesday 4 September, after the launch of the River Heroes report.

The IRF is a leading advocate and catalyst for the protection and restoration of the world’s rivers. Initiated by *Riverfestival*, it was established in 2003 as an independent not-for-profit organisation in response to the critical state of many of the world’s rivers.

The 10th International Riversymposium & Environmental Flows Conference is part of *Riverfestival*.

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Or visit www.riversymposium.com for more information on keynote speakers, discussion topics and programming schedule.