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MEDIA RELEASE

WA Rivers chosen as examples of best practice in global report

Two Western Australian river restoration projects have been highly praised in a new 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 Thies 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.

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

International Riverfoundation Chair, Martin Albrecht, said WA 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.

"Both WA projects demonstrate these elements and are to be especially recognised as excellent collaborative and community-focused ventures."

The Torbay Catchment Group in Western Australia won the National Thies Riverprize in 2006 and was chosen for the report because it demonstrates the successful formation of a stakeholder group with a governance structure.

In 1999 community concerns for the degraded Torbay waterways and wetlands prompted The Department of Environment and Heritage (now the Department of Environment and Water Resources) to offer its support to the newly formed Torbay Catchment Group.

Only two years later the project attracted more funding from Land and Water Australia and additional partnerships were formed with Water Corporation, City of Albany, Western Australia State Departments of Agriculture, Conservation and Land Management, universities and the local NGO, Green Skills.

This wide mix of players led to the successful integration of scientific research, local knowledge and community values and priorities, which in turn has resulted in a comprehensive, 30 year restoration plan for the Torbay Catchment with targets and responsibilities for all stakeholders.

The Blackwood Basin Group (BBG) in south-west WA has been used as another example of best practice due to its 'unique consultative, collaborative and farmer-friendly approach'.

BBG was formed because the Blackwood Basin faced several serious health issues prior to the 1990s including cattle damage to river banks, increasing sediment deposits, salinity and decreasing biodiversity of marine species.

More... /

WA Rivers chosen as examples of best practice in global report ... / 2

As well as damaging the river these issues, dryland salinity in particular, represented serious threats to the future of agricultural farming in the region.

BBG was established by concerned community members, conservationists, farmers and industry representatives in an attempt to reverse the degradation - it is still community managed today and has met every month for the past 14 years.

BBG won the International Thiess Riverprize in 2001 and in 2003 it developed the widely successful 'BestFarms' environmental management system (EMS) to help landholders manage their properties using environmentally sustainable and profitable land use practices and be recognised through a certification process.

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.