



Friday, 2nd March 2007

ATTENTION: Environment, Indigenous and Political Reporters

Indigenous Environment Alliance formed to protect the Murray-Lower Darling Country

An alliance of Indigenous Traditional Owners and Environment Groups has formed for the protection and restoration of the ecological and cultural values of the Murray and Lower Darling Rivers. The groups have formalised their alliance in a Cooperation Agreement.

“The importance of looking after country to both traditional owners and environment groups provides a logical and sound foundation for an agreement,” said Matt Rigney, Chairperson of the Murray and Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations (MLDRIN).

The Wilderness Society is one of the environment groups to have joined the alliance. “This agreement is a commitment by the Wilderness Society to link and support Aboriginal conservation efforts and the environmental goals of the wider community,” said Anthony Esposito, national manager of The Wilderness Society’s Indigenous Conservation Program.

The alliance recognises and respects the value of cooperation and the urgent need for Traditional Owners and environment groups to work together for the sake of future generations.

“Urgent and continual action is required to address unsustainable farming, logging and grazing practices, and the legacy of historical degradation. The creation of protected areas is a priority for the alliance,” said Richard Hughes, the Wilderness Society’s Victorian WildCountry campaigner.

“The alliance will seek to tackle land use practices and management which have greatly damaged the country of the Murray and Lower Darling, including the system’s tributaries and the many creeks, wetlands and drier country in their catchments.” said Jonathan La Nauze, Red Gum campaigner for Friends of the Earth

The Alliance will work on critical environmental and cultural issues, including the protection of river red gums and waterways.

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Background to the MLDRIN-ENGO Cooperation Agreement

- The Cooperation agreement was signed in Sydney on the 23rd February 2007
- The parties to the agreement are -
Murray and Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations - representing the Wiradjuri, Yorta Yorta, Taungurung, Barapa Barapa, Wamba Wamba, Wadi Wadi, Mutti Mutti, Latji Latji, Wergaia and the Ngarrindjeri; and
These Environment Non-Government Organisations - The Wilderness Society (National; Victoria; SA Branch; and Sydney); Friends of the Earth; National Parks Association of NSW; Victorian National Parks Association; Australian Conservation Foundation; Environment Victoria; Nature Conservation Council of NSW
- The Murray Darling Basin is a bio-geographical and ancestral domain of global significance. It is home to some 40 autonomous Indigenous Nations who are the original traditional custodians of the land.
- The Traditional Owners of the Murray and Lower Darling Rivers have a long and continuing affinity to the land and waters. The interconnection of cultural, social, economic and spiritual life has a direct impact on the health of Country and the health of her Peoples – these are inseparable.
- Over the past 200 years unsustainable land use practices and inappropriate management have greatly damaged the country of the Murray and Lower Darling, including the Murrumbidgee, Lachlan and Goulburn tributaries and the many creeks, wetlands and drier country in their catchments.
- Environment groups recognise the international importance of the area, with large areas of intact country and a network of rivers and streams supporting wetlands and other conservation values of international significance. It is also a place of historical, cultural and spiritual significance for non-Indigenous peoples.
- The first stage of the Agreement is to establish an alliance for the protection, revitalisation and maintenance of the Murray and Lower Darling Rivers systems.
- The alliance has begun development of an action plan for relevant activities, specific campaigns and areas of cooperation.