

State of the Environment Report

2017-2021

November 2021



murray river
council



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Cindy Power Photography, The Vibe Tribe,
Murray River Council staff

Introduction

A State of Environment Report (SoE) is a statement summarising the activities relevant to the environmental goals of the Community Strategic Plan (CSP) that have been undertaken by Council during its term.

This report covers the period 2017 – 2021 and highlights the top-level, ongoing actions undertaken to progress the CSP goals and achieve improved environmental outcomes across the Council.

Murray River Council is only one of many agencies with responsibilities for managing the quality and health of our environment, so we acknowledge the importance of partnerships with residents, community groups and government organisation to help us reduce the impact of environmental issues and make our lifestyle and environment more vibrant and sustainable.

This State of Environment Report accompanies our 2020/21 Annual report as per the Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework.

Our Environmental goals

We value our natural environment and expect it to be accessible, sustainable, managed, and healthy.

What we said in the Community Strategic Plan

“The importance of the Murray River and other waterways cannot be overstated. The Murray River is significant at a local, regional, state and national level. All our waterways underpin our agriculture-related manufacturing, natural environment, lifestyle, tourism and amenity. Our communities highly value access to the waterways, as well as other natural assets.”

What we said we wanted

- Enhancement and protection of our waterways, landscapes and environmental assets;
- Increased access to, and interaction with, the natural environment for recreation, amenity and enjoyment;
- Sustainable management of water resources to support local agricultural industries and value adding whilst managing and maintaining our beautiful natural environment;
- Planning and maintenance of community open space;
- Management and control (prevention/eradication/reduction/containment) of pest plants and pest animals;
- Encouragement of individuals and communities to value and protect neighbourhoods and the natural environment.



Environmental Objectives and Strategies

The Objective:



Protect and manage our unique natural environment.

The Strategy

2.1.1 Protect the water quality, aesthetic and environmental values of the Murray River, other waterways, and environs through consistent and aligned local and regional plans.

Key outcomes

Development of Murray Regional Strategic Management Plan (2017-2022)

The Murray Regional Strategic Weed Management Plan provides a framework for regional weed management. It was developed with input from Council and other regional weed committee members and their networks. The plan (and the legislation that underpins it) is based on the premise that biosecurity is everyone's responsibility. It supports development of this culture, guiding the community in effective and coordinated management of weeds and meeting relevant statutory obligations.

To date, the plan has guided resource allocation and biosecurity investment and provides a consistent basis for planning and delivery on both a local and regional level.

Development of Murray River Council Weed Action Plans (2015-2020 and 2020-2025)

Council's Weed Action Plan is reviewed and developed every 5 years and focuses on managing weeds to improve biosecurity in the local area. It provides a streamlined, clear framework for safeguarding primary industries, natural environments and communities from a range of pests, diseases and weeds.

The plan sets the vision and goals for weed management in the region, and outlines strategies and actions to achieve outcomes that protects the economy, environment and community from the negative impacts of pests, diseases and weeds.

Key actions include ongoing, coordinated inspections along the local waterways, and subsequent weed control measures in and along the waterways.

The strategy

2.1.2 Work with government agencies to ensure balanced use of National Parks for residents and visitors.

Key outcomes

Liaised with National parks about weeds and inspections

Council is regularly liaising with local National Parks to provide guidance with, or carry out weed control programs on the grounds.

We identify and prioritise specific sites where control programs will be of most benefit to native biodiversity.

This also includes weed control on National Park riverbank areas as part of a Local Land Services Weed Control Grant to control aquatic weeds.

The Objective:



Protect and manage our unique natural environment.

The Strategy

2.1.3 Encourage and develop community and neighbourhood initiatives to enhance and protect the natural environment.

Key outcomes

Waste management strategies and education programs

Through the introduction of a waste team in 2019, Council has been focused on continuously improving our waste management and resource recovery services.

Council continues to deliver a range of initiatives to reduce waste-to-landfill, including:

- The introduction of garden waste recovery (with food organics soon to be introduced)
- New and improved kerbside collection contracts
- Programs to target difficult to recycle materials
- Greater community engagement via education programs and initiatives (“what waste goes where”, early childhood and kindergarten program, update web education pages, to name a few)
- Installation of furniture bins in open spaces to encourage waste collection and recycling
- Adoption and implementation of the Waste Management Strategy (2019).

Food and Garden Organics Collection Programs

Council introduced the Garden Organics collection program into Mathoura and Moama in 2018. Funding was also secured to expand the service right across the council area, paving the way for Food Organics to be added to the collection program in 2022.

This green-lid kerbside collection provides residents with more options for separating their waste, with the aim of improving recovery rates, increasing diversion from landfill and reducing costs of processing material.

Operation Bindii to encourage community to remove caltrop from our towns

In an effort to keep the area clear of weeds, Council ran a campaign asking local residents to take a proactive approach to assist with the eradication of the Caltrop weed from their own backyards.

As an added incentive, Council offered all residents the chance to win gift vouchers to spend in their local community by simply sending in a before-and-after image of the weed removal. The campaign was a big success, with lots of participants. It also provided an extra opportunity to increase awareness about weed control on private, urban properties.

Community Recycling Centres

Council established a Community Recycling Centre (CRC) at Moama’s Waste Management Facility. This was one of the strategies introduced to reduce waste sent to landfill. The site is a permanent drop-off centre for common household problem wastes that can’t be collected via council’s kerbside waste and recycling collection services.

There are also Community Recycling drop off boxes at the other landfill sites in the council, providing ready-access to all residents.

The Objective:



Protect and manage our unique natural environment.

Campaigns to target illegal dumping

Our Waste and Compliance Teams have taken a coordinated approach to stop people and businesses illegally disposing of waste.

The disposal of waste on private and public land creates social and environmental impacts on the local community. We work with government, industry and the community to educate locals on the importance of correct waste disposal, using surveillance to target illegal activity.

The Strategy

2.1.4 Increase community awareness and education about the value of the natural environment.

Key outcomes

MRC Landholder Weed Management Program

Following the wind-up of the Central Murray Country Council in 2019, Council established a Biosecurity Team to co-ordinate weed control measures with landholders and develop effective and long-term control programs for the council as a whole.

Since commencing the team have worked with local landholders, delivering:

- Landholder education program
- Priority Weed Handbooks
- Ongoing campaigns targeting seasonal weeds
- A program to target aquatic weeds.

The increased presence of the weeds team has seen an increase in community reporting of weeds.

MRC Weeds awareness program in schools

Council's Biosecurity Team has delivered programs into schools (COVID-permitting) in the aim of educating students about the importance of preventing and reducing weeds.

This included:

- Interactive presentation delivered by the Biosecurity Team
- Videos talking and showing kids about certain priority weeds
- Take-home resources about local weeds and control.

This program will continue to expand, fostering increased awareness of, and involvement in, local weed issues. Young people are the land managers of the future, so council will continue to involve them in weed issues through an on-going program of classroom and field-based activities.

Increased media presence to support weeds education

Council looks to harnesses the enthusiasm of students, landholders and the general community by encouraging them to join together to learn about and tackle local weed problems.

This has been supported by an increased media presence to flag and highlight topical weed issues and control measures via social media, radio, print and targeted education campaigns.

The Objective:



Protect and manage our unique natural environment.

The Strategy

2.1.5 Manage and control pest plants and pest animals.

Key outcomes

Priority weeds and pests are mapped and controlled throughout the MRC

We manage pest animal and weed populations in our parks and wider reserve system aligning with both the Murray Regional Strategic Weed Management Plan 2017-2022 and the Murray River Council Weed Action Plans 2015-2020 and 2020-2025.

Key priority weeds include Boxthorns, Horehound, Bridal Creeper, Khaki Weed, Silverleaf Nightshade, Spiny Burrgrass, St. Johns Wort and catheads.

Rabbits are identified as key pests locally, so council implements control measures via baiting to protect native animals and plants, maintain natural ecosystems and cultural heritage at sites like cemeteries.

Our overall aim is to continuously minimise the spread of pest animals and weeds to and from neighbouring land.



The Objective:



Increase access to natural environment for recreation, amenity and enjoyment.

The Strategy

2.2.1 Plan for and create a network of walking and cycle paths connecting our natural environments and our townships.

Key outcomes

Walking and cycling track upgrades/upkeep

Council has undertaken a range of new public track improvement works, including:

- Murray Downs walking track from Murray Downs Resort to Swan Hill Road
- Tooleybuc Township River walk: Mensforth Park to Sporties Club, Murray street south
- Picnic Point road shared path and foot bridges.

Council also has regular parks and gardens and weed maintenance programs to maintain existing bike, walking tracks and rec reserves.

The Strategy

2.2.2 Work with neighbouring councils to develop joint projects that enhance access and enjoyment of iconic river sites (on both sides of the river, and connecting major river towns)

Key outcomes

Our Region Our Rivers projects

Council is part of a joint infrastructure project of seven local councils called Our Region, Our Rivers.

The Councils – Swan Hill, Gannawarra, Buloke,

Loddon, Balranald, Murray River and Edward River – gained funding through the Federal Regional Growth Fund to deliver projects that enhance riverside infrastructure and assets.

Council continues to progress Mensforth Park Stage Two, Picnic Point Boat Ramp and Barham Riverside Park.

Collaborative weed management

Council continues to engage with neighbouring councils and cross-border organisations to identify and develop projects that support efforts to minimise weeds in the river area. Some key examples include:

- Cross border weeds team worked together to apply for a \$250,000 grant under the Murray Darling Basin Healthy Rivers Program to control boxthorns along the Murray River
- Received a \$20,000 grant from Murray Local Land Services to control aquatic weeds along a 550km length of the Murray River in the MRC
- Field days held with other councils and government organisations to identify and control high priority weeds around MRC and neighbouring councils, including Victoria
- Boxthorn removal project with Local Lands Services on their RAMSAR sites.

The Objective:



Increase access to natural environment for recreation, amenity and enjoyment.

The Strategy

2.2.3 Enable access to rivers and waterways for recreational enjoyment.

Key outcomes

Tooleybuc and Barham Pontoons

To improve connectivity between our waterways and our towns, council delivered new pontoon structures in Barham and Tooleybuc during the 2019/2020 year.

Identified as key infrastructure desired by local communities, the new pontoons have fully transformed the riverside park areas into accessible and active locations that connect the communities directly to the Murray River.

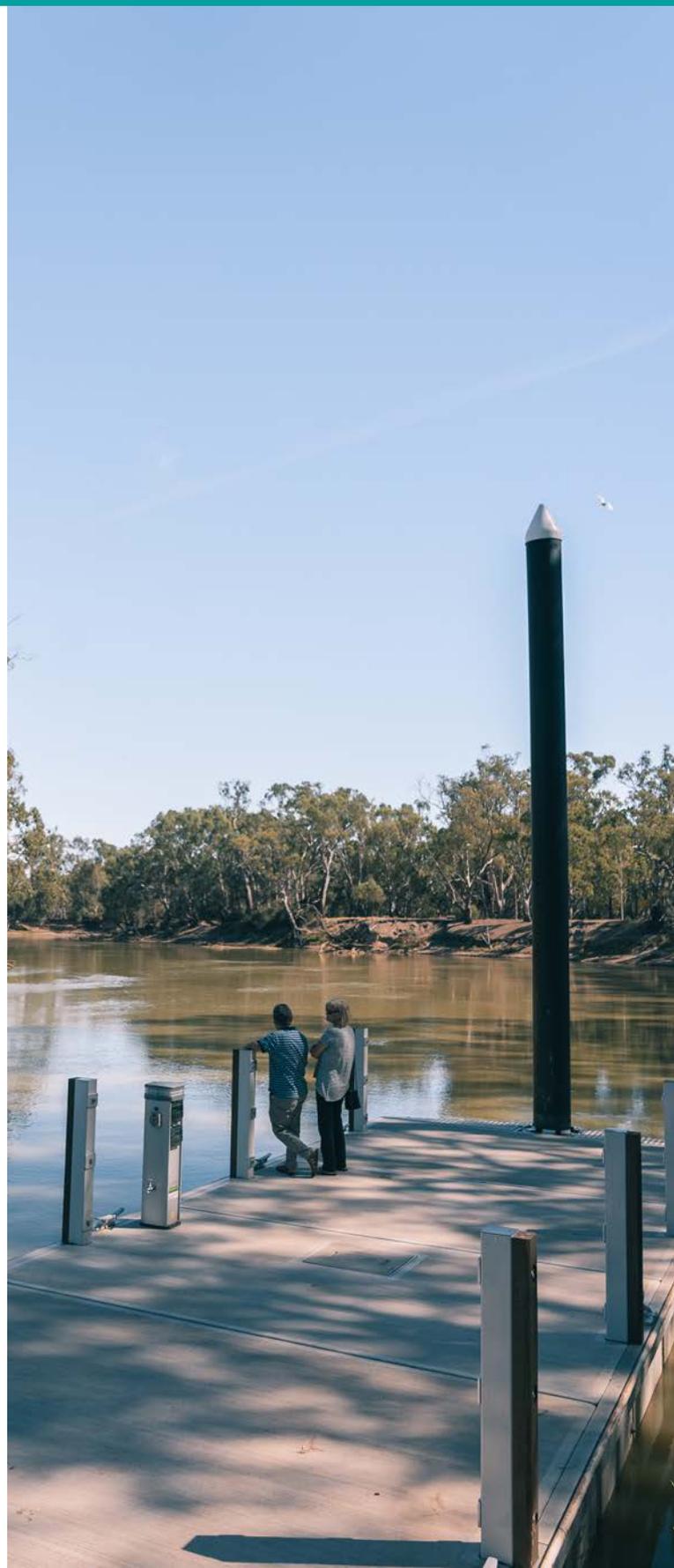
Both these projects are a great example of Council and the community working together to bring the community's wish-list-items to life.

Riverside parks and structures

Council continues to maintain riverside park areas and deliver infrastructure that better connects the space to the river system.

This includes boardwalks, boats ramps, pontoons and beach areas.

Improvements are ongoing and continue to be planned for as we further activate our riverfront areas.



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and expect it to be accessible,
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PO Box 906 Moama, 2731

murrayriver.nsw.gov.au

1300 087 004