

4th National Waterwatch Conference

Title: Marketing Stressed Rivers - The Central Highlands Waterwatch Experience

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Within the Central Highlands Region of Victoria, situated at the top of the Corangamite Catchment is the Moorabool and Yarrowee/Leigh Rivers. These Rivers are classified as 'Stressed Rivers' under the Victorian River Health Strategy. The Moorabool has been referred to as a "basket case" in recent publications, which creates a negative image and attitude throughout the community. With degraded characteristics of the rivers, including high nutrients, sediments, low flow, pest plants, animals and an overall decline in biodiversity the morale and interest in regards to these rivers has become very poor.

In 2003 Central Highlands Regional Waterwatch asked the question; how do we make 'so called' undesirable rivers desirable? How do we increase the profile of these rivers to the community with the goal of long-term change and local interaction, interest and involvement in environmental river management?

Central Highlands Regional Waterwatch decided that to effectively engage the community we need to supply information to them with information in a format that is firstly useful to the reader and secondly presented in a format that is visually motivating and easy to identify and relate to. The information needed to be precise, not long-winded and cover a diverse amount of topics. So much so they would like to know more.

This would not only maintain the readers interest, but also motivate them to ask question and generate interest to 'learn more about their local river health'.

Information supplied on the posters is informative and locally focused, relating to that particular river and that river section. The posters targeted the upper, middle and lower section of the river system. This was not an easy task, as some sections of the rivers were not clearly defined. The Posters include exclusive information on indigenous and exotic species, local geology, land use and overall river health that is promoted in a highly visual display.

The greatest difficulty experienced throughout the project was sourcing specific information in regards to local sections of a river. The majority of the information found on river systems is quite generic such as what commonly grows in the area, the local geology and major pest species. However if you are to look for specific information on a particular section of a river its very difficult or in a unusable format either meshed in data or in a scientific form.

There were still areas that had no answers, these answers were found by talking to researchers and locals that have had constant contact and an understanding of the river. Information was gained through old research projects that had been carried out. Community interest groups also played a vital part in regards to finding information on the rivers. The local people were a very important link in this process. There was also a need to ground truth in some of these areas due to the fact that there is no available information.

It was decided that the best way to assist in the presentation of the posters was to show a heroic image of that section of the river (which was not always an easy task). This became the visual focus and demonstrated the best-case scenario for that reach. This was to be a dominating feature, and something

to aspire to regarding river health. As the photo was of the local region it is realistic and an obtainable goal. Australian local environmental systems are very unique as they do vary a lot and really do not fit into a generic basket especially the typical European model that we tend to use. There are no unrealistic or unrelated photos of tropical rain forest, marlin fishing, or cute baby fur seals. The hero picture was supported with other related photographs showing some of the typical local issues and threats that impact on the waterway.

The other visual displays used are of Fauna these consist of native Birds, Fish and Macro invertebrates indigenous to the region. The images that were used related specifically to that river reach. For instance you will not find stone fly lava in the lower reaches of the river, so why show them!

Central Highlands Regional Waterwatch held a round table discussion in December 2003 with Central Highlands Water and the Corangamite Catchment Management Authority. The need for the community to see some of the more desirable parts of the river to gain an understanding of the Central Highlands Region catchment as a whole, were major priorities highlighted from the discussions.

This needed to be promoted and understood, if the newly developed 'IIII (Interaction, Interest, Involvement, In) Local Environmental Rivers Management Program' was to be a successful educational initiative. Central Highlands Regional Waterwatch Program sourced the expertise of a local who had an intrinsic knowledge, understanding and passion for the region's river system. Researcher Alison Pouliot, a fresh water scientist was commissioned to encapsulate the river's beauty as well as its degradation through research and the lens of a camera. Central Highlands Regional Waterwatch was then able to design, structure and develop the informative poster series.

We have found that the 'IIII (Interaction, Interest, Involvement, In) Local Environmental Rivers Management Program' is an effective marketing tool to increase community awareness and capacity of the catchment, as it starts to gain momentum we are targeting local Landcare groups, landholders, school children and special interest groups. The posters are one part of a broader communication strategy that includes information packs to be developed and will cover topics such as 1. Introducing the River. 2 Issues of the River. 3 Aquatic macro invertebrates of the River. 4 Common aquatic & riparian plant species of the River. 5 Common fauna of the 1 River Catchment. 6 Common fish species of the River. 7 Cultural History of the River. 8 Water quality of the River and a Map of the Moorabool River.

These information resources put into perspective what we have, what we need to protect, and what are our realistic goals. This initiative greatly assists programs like Waterwatch to engage monitors, who have a specific goal in mind and want to make change and a difference to the health of their local river.

If we understand the issues, we know where the goal posts are and we have a tangible path in which to achieve a desired outcome.

The poster series was launched as part of the Central Highlands Region Waterwatch Programs 10 year birthday celebration which coincided with National Water Week 2004. The program has had a great response in regards to the poster series with positive feedback from community interest groups, teachers, Landcare Groups and local individuals. Year to date we have distributed over 2,000 posters throughout the broader community.

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