

The Evolution of a Water Team

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ABSTRACT: The Northern Waterway Assessment Program has been running now for 3 years and has achieved a number of significant milestones. The program brings together the best of volunteer based Waterwatch and the accepted rigor of AURIVAS monitoring. This approach has led to the State of Tasmania accepting the monitoring data as part of their datasets. It has enabled the production of a regional water quality and stream condition report, which provides the basis for on-ground works programs in the region and refines the focus areas for further investigation. It has increased the participation of volunteers in water quality monitoring and it has significantly increased awareness of water quality issues in Northern Tasmania.

The program is a partnership between NRM North and the Launceston Environment Centre, supported by the Commonwealth government, State Government, Local Government, not for profit organizations and community groups. This inclusive approach has provided a model for other regions and other monitoring programs and has ensured that the program, in some form, will survive the vagaries of funding cycles. The foundation laid by this approach now enables the team and the region to smoothly transition into implementing a full Index of River Condition process as well as developing regionally and locally specific water quality targets. A regular review of sites and approaches is undertaken by the stakeholder based technical panel to ensure that best practice is always considered and innovative approaches developed to improve the role of the program.

The key success of the program lies in developing innovative approaches, the partnerships formed, the dedicated local staff team and the commitment of the regional NRM body to developing a multi tiered water quality monitoring program for use by multiple stakeholders.

INTRODUCTION: The Northern Waterway Assessment Team owes a huge debt of gratitude to the legacy of previous Waterwatch coordinators in Tasmania including robust Quality Assurance/ Quality Control procedures and to the ethic of Waterwatch: the concepts of communities caring for catchments, the free sharing of skills and information, the emphasis on ongoing training and capacity building as well as the celebration of successes.

THE FIRST THREE YEARS: The Northern Waterway Assessment Team has been working now for 3 years and has achieved a number of significant milestones. The integration of a community monitoring program with the regional framework has enabled a more strategic approach and a more robust program than was previously possible under NHT 1.

The Northern Waterway Assessment Program works as a partnership between NRM North, the regional Natural Resource Management body, and the Launceston Environment Centre, a not for profit community groups. It is funded by the Commonwealth government through NHT 2, delivered through NRM North's Regional Investment Proposal.

The Launceston Environment Centre employs and houses the team with in-kind support from Dorset Council who provide an office for one of the team members. Team members have training and accreditation in the Australian Rivers Assessment System (AusRivAS) and use

equipment and protocols to the same standard as the State Agency, the Department of Primary Industry and Water (DPIW).

One of the first tasks of the team was to work with a stakeholder based technical steering committee to develop a Framework for Monitoring and Reporting including QAQC and Occupational Health and Safety. The team also established a strategic, region-wide, Water Monitoring Plan to complement the monitoring undertaken by DPIW. The team and steering committee regularly review the monitoring plan to ensure that best practice is always considered and innovative approaches developed to improve the role of the program. The team currently carries out monthly water quality monitoring at fifty two sites as well as spring and autumn AusRivAS river health assessment at forty five sites. The team calendar and workplan accommodate the seasonal variations in work load associated with AusRivAS.

Team members also support a network of adult Waterwatch volunteers who carry out monthly water quality monitoring at an additional fifty sites. The equipment used is less expensive and the QAQC program gives the data a confidence level of +/- 10%. Volunteers also conduct some Signal river health assessment in spring and autumn.

The State Agency, DPIW, has provided a copy of both their water quality and AusRivAS databases and accepts both team and volunteer data for inclusion on State databases. In the future this data will be made available to the community via the DPIW website. Team water data is coded as having a confidence level of +/- 5%. The data meets the Australia and New Zealand Environment and Conservation Council (ANZECC) standards.

The Northern Waterway Assessment Program has increased the participation of volunteers in water quality monitoring through the Northern Waterwatch network which has its own logo. Volunteers range from members of Landcare, Waterwatch and fishing groups to dedicated individuals. Involvement in the network is building community capacity through increasing knowledge, skills and awareness relating to water quality in Northern Tasmania. Waterwatch volunteers are also gaining friendships, forming partnerships and a sense of connectedness to their community.

One of the major outputs from the team is an annual regional water quality and stream condition report. The report helps NRM North and other agencies to refine on-ground works programs in the region and in future will report on the effectiveness of Property Management Planning and other programs.

FUTURE DIRECTONS: The team is currently involved in the trialing of a new Tasmanian River Condition Index (TRCI) process and is developing regionally and locally specific water quality targets. The successes of the team should ensure that that the program will, in some form, survive the vagaries of funding cycles.

CONCLUSION: There are some take home messages for other regions and monitoring programs. In the spirit of seeking innovative approaches, a successful Waterway Assessment team can be compared to a successful bellydance troupe.

Work within a strong framework such as a regional NRM or CMA strategy.
Bellydance needs a strong framework such as great choreography and music.

Work with your regional NRM or CMA authority to develop a multi-tiered water assessment program for use by multiple stakeholders. Ensure that this program complements monitoring carried out by other agencies.

Work with the bellydance community in your area and timetable classes and performances with them so there are no clashes.

Have a code of conduct such as celebrating volunteers and caring for waterways.
Bellydance is never sleazy and is a form of celebration and communication between people.

Build a skilled, enthusiastic and committed team.
Belly dance also needs teamwork, skills and commitment.

Establish the credibility of your data by developing protocols such as Quality Assurance Quality Control.
Bellydancers establish their credibility by rehearsing to ensure that each performance is a good one.

Provide regular training, support and capacity building for employees and volunteers. Build succession planning into your program.
Teach classes and attend classes yourself to gain new ideas, generate enthusiasm and ensure a constant supply of troupe members.

Develop good partnerships with a range of stakeholders.
Perform as part of your local community for example, at the local Christmas parade.

Be inclusive and continually seek to engage all players.
Members of a good bellydance troupe will engage the audience by using eye contact and body language and by moving among them.

Develop a work plan which takes into account seasonal rhythms of work, e.g. Signal and AusRivAS.
A Bellydance troupe is powered by the rhythm of music.

Develop a corporate identity with uniforms and logos.
Bellydance performers wear colorful and exciting costumes with lots of bling.

Continually adapt to changes and seek innovative approaches.
Develop new choreography and incorporate new moves, ideas and music.

Build protocols for assessing and reporting.
Find some one you respect to give you feedback on how the troupe is progressing.

Deliver on key outputs such as an annual regional water quality and stream condition report.
Perform in public.

Communicate the goals and achievements of your program.
Let people know about your troupe through media and word of mouth.

Celebrate successes with launches and social occasions.
Have regular fun get togethers with other bellydancers.