

The MDBA–MDFRC Collaboration Project



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Communication Strategy

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The MDBA–MDFRC Collaboration Project – Communication Strategy

Final report prepared for the Murray–Darling Basin Authority by The Murray–Darling Freshwater Research Centre.

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This Communication Strategy was prepared by The Murray–Darling Freshwater Research Centre (MDFRC). The aim of the MDFRC is to provide the scientific knowledge necessary for the management and sustained utilisation of the Murray–Darling Basin water resources. The MDFRC is a joint venture between La Trobe University and CSIRO.



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Executive Summary

This document should be read as a “living” document that will guide the communication activities undertaken by the MDBA-MDFRC collaboration project team (MMCP). The main purpose of this document is to give an overview of, and to guide the communication activities for the MMCP project. The activities outlined in the document will be regularly reviewed and updated to reflect current and planned research and communication activities. Planned activities include (but are not limited to) team and theme meetings, reporting to MDBA and MDFRC executive, forums, seminars and presentations, outputs of factsheets, scientific publications, media releases and updates on social media sites as well as the MMCP webpage (www.mdfr.org.au/projects/MMCP)

The ultimate goal of the communication strategy is to identify our key stakeholders, identify ways to communicate effectively with them and raise the overall awareness of the MDBA – MDFRC Collaboration Project and its outcomes.

Background

The objective of the collaborative between the Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) and The Murray-Darling Freshwater Research Centre (MDFRC) is to enable the MDFRC to continue in its role of supporting sustainable water management and to improve the relationship and communication between MDFRC and Basin water managers.

The MMCP project aims to contribute supporting science to underpin the Basin-Wide Watering Strategy (www.mdba.gov.au/sites/default/files/pubs/Final-BWS-Nov14_0816.pdf).

Specific objectives include:

- Improving understanding of the relationship between flow, ecosystem function and biodiversity
- Improving managers' capacity to predict the environmental outcomes of water management and complementary natural resource management.
- Improved capacity to evaluate the threats to ecosystem function and diversity under a range of water management and climate scenarios.
- Improving capacity to assess ecosystem condition and identify the interventions most likely to effectively and efficiently achieve environmental objectives.

The MMCP directly address the Basin Plan environmental objectives:

- Protect and restore water-dependant ecosystems
The maintenance of connectivity both longitudinally and laterally is recognised as being important in the protection and restoration of aquatic ecosystems. The MMCP aims to provide managers with the tools to make informed decisions on (i) how effectively the creation of longitudinal connectivity from the Sea-to-Hume has restored native fish communities, and (ii) how the operation of infrastructure (pumps/regulators) to restore lateral connectivity between rivers and wetlands will lead to changes in vegetation communities by either selecting for or against seeds with specific traits.
- Protect and restore the ecosystem functions of water-dependant ecosystems
The management and restoration of native fish populations has primarily targeted the maintenance of flows and habitats that promote recruitment and growth of larvae and juvenile fish. The success of these actions may be limited due to a poor understanding of (i) what the appropriate flow regimes are required to support the growth of native fish, and (ii) whether the appropriate food resources occur under current conditions to support the recruitment and growth of native fish. The MMCP will provide water resource managers with the knowledge on how to manipulate flow regimes to support and maintain food resources and promote the growth of native fish.
- Ensure that water-dependant ecosystems are resilient to climate change and other risks and threats
The MMCP will provide water resource managers with the knowledge on how best to manipulate water regimes to maintain ecosystem function (including native seed dispersal and growth of aquatic organisms) and protect water-dependant ecosystems as the demand for water resources increases under climate change scenarios.

Purpose of the Plan

The main goals of this plan are to:

1. Identify key stakeholder groups for communication messages.
2. Develop effective means for communication with stakeholders.
3. Increase stakeholder engagement via a number of communication methods as listed below.
4. Increase the awareness and profile of the MMCP project among key stakeholders.
5. Increase the awareness and profile of the MMCP project among the community.
6. Develop strategies for dissemination of research results to stakeholders.
7. Have outcomes of the project incorporated into management activities undertaken by state and commonwealth agencies.

Stakeholders for the Project

Primary

- Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA)
- Joint Government Representatives (JGR)
- Basin Official Committee (BOC)
- The Murray-Darling Freshwater Research Centre (MDFRC)
- MDFRC Partners – La Trobe University and CSIRO
- MDFRC Investment Committee
- State and Federal water resource managers (e.g. CEWO, DoE)
- Natural Resource Managers, Catchment Management Authorities (Vic) and Local Land Services and other relevant Natural resource managers

Secondary

- Scientists in the ecology field
- Politicians
- Community groups
- General public
- Local, state and national media.

Communication approach

This project expects to yield substantive information that will better enable water resource managers to make informed decision on the best utilization of environmental water. As such, the primary audience for communication activities will be water resource managers and scientists. However, a variety of other engagement activities will inform a broad range of other stakeholders about the project and its findings.

Internal communication

Task	Activity	Audience	Purpose
Project meetings	Monthly project meetings with all team members of the MMCP project	All project members.	This will act as an ongoing progress report for the project and will ensure that all project members are up to date with all project activities being

			undertaken.
Individual theme meetings	Monthly theme meetings with all members of the theme.	All members in the theme.	The purpose of this to provide ongoing support and reporting within the theme on progress etc.
Reporting	<p>MDFRC Executive Committee reports are required bi-monthly and require a summary of progress towards achieving project objectives. This information will be generated by Theme leaders and presented by the project leader.</p> <p>The MMCP is contracted to produce a <i>quarterly reports</i> an <i>annual progress report</i> that is submitted to the Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA). The MDBA will then distribute the reports to the Joint Government Representatives (JGR). These reports will contain detailed descriptions of project activities generated by theme leaders and compiled by the project leader.</p>	<p>MDFRC Executive Committee – Bi-Monthly, MDBA (quarterly reports & annual progress reports) & JGR.</p> <p><i>NOTE: Further circulation of the reports beyond the JGR is not considered desirable until the information contained within the reports is peer reviewed.</i></p>	<p>The main purpose of reporting is to keep key stakeholders up to date with the progress of the project and to raise any issues as the project progresses.</p> <p>The reports to the MDBA are a contractual obligation.</p>
Basin Official Committee questions	The MDFRC will provide the BOC with responses to two strategic questions.	BOC, MDBA and JGR	The responses to these questions are in the form of reviews or synthesis papers as considered pieces of advice representing the consolidation of the current state of scientific knowledge directly targeted to the issues of concern to BOC.
Teleconference meetings	Undertake phone meetings with Joint Government Representatives on a regular basis.	JGR	The main purpose of teleconference meetings is to keep key stakeholders up to date with the progress of the project and to raise any issues as the

			project progresses.
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External communication

Task	Activity	Audience	Purpose
Annual Joint State Government forum	The annual forum will take place prior to the end of each financial year to enable the MDBA and JSG to influence research plans for the next financial year by recommending changes to the research plan. At the forum, theme leaders will present outcomes from their respective project components and outline proposed activities to be undertaken in the following financial year.	MDBA, JGR & CSIRO Department of Agriculture & Water Resources, CEWO, Department of Environment, MDFRC Investment Committee	To obtain agreement between the MDBA, the JSG and project team members on progress of project and suitability on-going activities.
Engagement with state organisations	To facilitate ongoing engagement with state managers and researcher the project team will present results of the project in each of the states represented by the JGR. The forum of these presentations will be decided by mutual agreement and may include seminars and workshop activities. State-based forum will occur annually.	State agencies	Shared understanding of the objectives of the MMCP and dissemination of findings to state Government agencies.
MDBA seminar series	The project team will present outcomes from their research bi-annually in the MDBA seminar series.		Shared understanding of the objectives of the MMCP and dissemination of findings to MDBA as well as those within the wider scientific community.
MMCP website	The MMCP website (currently under development: www.mdfrc.org.au/projects/MMCP) will be the central location for project information.	All stakeholders	The website is a first point of contact for people with an interest in the project. It will provide an overview of the project, its objectives, activities and outputs. All major outputs will be downloadable from the site to ensure they remain accessible to managers and stakeholders into the future.

Factsheets	Fact sheets will be produced for each of the project themes to provide a summary of key findings outputs. Fact sheets will be downloadable from the MMCP website and distributed to the MDBA and JGR offices.	All stakeholders – but main audience will be managers and other interested parties who may have an interest in the outcomes of the project.	Fact sheets can be both an effective and efficient means of summarising and synthesising information, and ensuring that it remains accessible.
MDFRC newsletter	The newsletter is disseminated via email and compiled by the MDFRC communication team. It will be released quarterly and contain an update of the project.	All stakeholders	The MDFRC newsletter is an effective and efficient means of summarising project information. It also increases the awareness of the project.
Publications	Outcomes from each of the themes within the MMCP are expected to lead to scientific publications including peer-reviewed journal articles. Opportunities for publications are generally expected to be identified and pursued by the individual theme leaders. All publications will be downloadable from the MMCP website.	Water resource managers & scientists	Disseminate results of the project themes.
Conferences	Presentations will be undertaken at relevant conferences where there is a strong management presence (e.g. Australian Society for Limnology and/or the Rivers symposium – both these conferences are in. Copies of all presentations will be downloadable from the MMCP website.	Water resource managers & scientists	Conferences provide an important communication pathway with managers and external scientists engaged in management.
Social media	Social media activities include posting on MDFRC Facebook and Twitter pages.	All stakeholders within the wider community	Social media is an effective way of keeping people external to the project aware of progress within each of the project themes as well as raising the awareness of the project.
Media releases	This will involve sending out releases about newsworthy topics relating to the MMCP project. It will be opportunistic in response to key events (i.e. awarding of student scholarships).	All stakeholders within the wider community	Sending out media releases to a range of media outlets will allow the important stories we have to go directly to the media as a story pitch. If the story is picked up, it

			has the potential to raise the awareness of the MMCP project.
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Timeframe

A full timeframe of the above communication activities can be found in **Appendix A**.

Acknowledgement

All published outputs from the MMCP will acknowledge that the project is supported by funding from the Joint State Governments (JSG). All communication material will include the acknowledgment “*Project supported through the Murray–Darling Basin Joint Governments*”. ***The Murray -Darling Basin Joint Governments are made up of;***

- Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (Victoria)
- NSW Department of Primary Industries (New South Wales)
- Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources (South Australia)
- Department of Natural Resources and Mines (Queensland)
- ACT Environment and Sustainable Development (Australian Capital Territory)
- Department of Agriculture & Water Resources

Audience

Component	Activity	Audience	Responsible
Internal communication	Executive reports	MDFRC executive	Project leader
	Quarterly milestone reports	MDBA, JGR	Project leader
	Annual report	MDBA, JGR	Project leader
External communication	BOC questions	BOC, MDBA, JGR	Project leader
	Annual JGR forum	MDBA, JGR & others	Project team
	State engagement	State agencies	Project team
	MDBA seminar series		Project team
	MMCP website	All stakeholders	Project leader
	MDFRC newsletter	All stakeholders	Project team, with support from MDFRC communications committee
	Fact sheets	All stakeholders	Theme leaders
	Publications	Managers/Scientists	Theme leaders
	Conference presentations	Managers/Scientists	Theme leaders
	Social media	All stakeholders	Project team, with support from MDFRC communications committee

Media release

All stakeholders

Project team.
With support
from MDFRC
communications
committee

Budget

The project team has allocated \$20,000 per annum to undertake the communication activities listed above.

Activity	2016-2017	2017-2018
Annual JGR forum ¹	3,000	3,000
MDBA seminar series ²	2,000	2,000
State seminars ³	4,000	4,000
Web page ⁴	4,262	4,420
Factsheets ⁵	4,262	4,420
Conference presentation ⁶	2,000	2,000
Total	19,524	19,840

Evaluation

This is to be viewed as a “living” document that will assist in communication activities. The activities outlined above will be regularly reviewed and updated to reflect current and planned communications activities.

The main scope of measuring if the communication goals were met will be through a range of quantitative and qualitative measures including social media metrics, surveys/feedback, participations, report metrics etc.

Management uptake:

Success of our communications in regards to management uptake will be measured by in a number of ways:

- i. Engagement and feedback surveys from MDBA & JGR
- ii. How outcomes been incorporated into management activities?
- iii. Have we assisted in a more efficient and effective way of managing environmental water?
- iv. What was our **impact** in terms of management of environmental water? What decisions were made as a result of our research?

Knowledge output & science uptake:

- i. How many journal publications and report citations were there published across the duration of the project? This will be **measured by looking at publication and report numbers.**
- ii. What was the scope of the media attention in regards to knowledge output? This will be **measured through our media monitoring services.**

¹ Based on costing for 2016

² Based on flights for 2 people from Albury

³ Based on flights for 4 people from Albury to Adelaide

⁴ Salary for technician for 5 days

⁵ Salary for technician for 5 days

⁶ Estimated conference registration, travel and accommodation

Stakeholder engagement:

One way that stakeholder engagement will be measured is by social media metrics. Success of social media will be measured through three different metrics which are as follows.

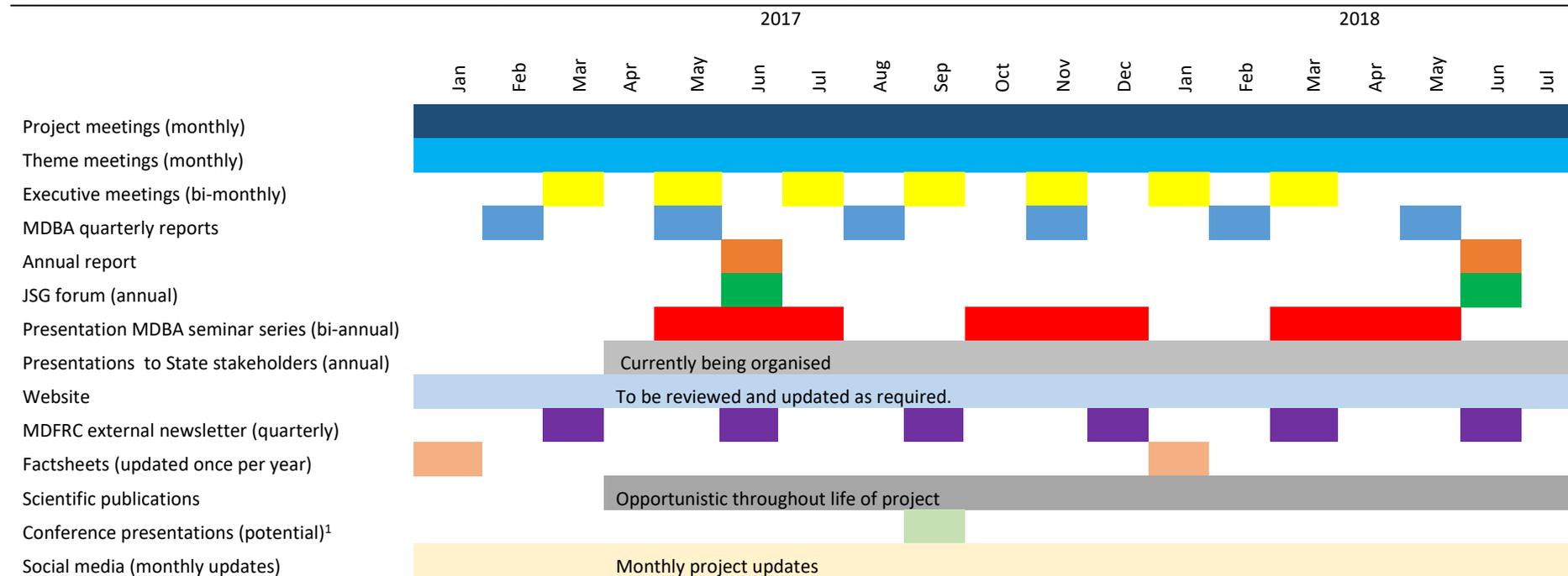
- i. Reach
 - i. The number of “Followers” and “Likes” on social media accounts.
 - ii. The number of “Visits” to the MMCP website.
- ii. Engagement
 - i. The number of shares on Facebook and re-tweets on Twitter.
 - ii. The number of comments on Facebook.
- iii. Conversion
 - i. The number of downloads of factsheets and reports from website.
 - ii. The number of follow up phone call received.

Another way of measuring stakeholder engagement is through participation in seminars and conferences and direct feedback from stakeholders. This type of engagement will be **measured through surveys, attendance numbers for conference and seminar talks.**

- i. What was the feedback from clients and stakeholders?
- ii. What were the participation levels in seminars and conferences?

Appendix

Appendix A: Time frames for undertaking each communication activity



¹The ASL conference is scheduled to occur in September 2017