



Rescuing the Murray and Darling Rivers in Australia

The Results

High levels of salinity and degradation are a major problem on the east coast of Australia.



High levels of salt have severely degraded the environment in the Murray Darling estuaries

Over 700,000 trees have been planted in a four year period to help save two of Australia's largest river systems. The aim of the Murray Darling Rescue – named after the Murray River and the Darling River was established in 2002, and has been a very successful project for Scouts Australia in being proactive in environmental management; teaching Scouts the importance of our natural environment and working towards their award scheme badges; generating corporate relationships; and displaying Scouting in a very positive light in local and national media.

The tree planting projects have been targeted at high priority salinity sites – places where the below ground water table has come very close to the surface, bringing with it salty water which can destroy the soils. There were once 28 billion trees in the Murray Darling catchment, but there are now only 5 billion trees. This severe reduction has caused many environmental issues.

The planting of trees provides many advantages including:

- a buffer to streams and waterways to help prevent erosion and purify water;
- as the trees grow, their roots help to bring the water table down;
- the trees use carbon dioxide as they grow, storing carbon in their trunks

and producing oxygen gas. This reduces the greenhouse effect, and cleanses the air;

- the plant species are local to the area, and provide enhanced habitat for many animal species, including the threatened Tuan (*Phascogale tapoatafa*) and Squirrel Glider (*Petaurus norfolcensis*)

The Methods

Scouts Australia entered into a partnership with Greenfleet, an organization that plants trees to offset carbon emissions of vehicles. Greenfleet offered to identify planting sites in high priority salinity areas, and arranged the site preparation, equipment for tree planting and the seedlings.



All the equipment is provided by Greenfleet - Scouts add the energy and enthusiasm

Scouts Australia provided the enthusiastic Scouts, friends and family members to undertake the tree planting over a weekend in several sites across Australia.



Strategic Priority 7

Scouting's Profile – strengthening communications, partnerships and resources



STRATEGY
ACHIEVING
OUR MISSION

The World Organization of the Scout Movement

Scouts Australia also secured another sponsor, Holden Motor Company, to assist with funds to get the project off the ground and produce promotional materials.

In three states and one territory, the Scouts would arrive in winter (the best time in Australia for tree planting) for a weekend of tree planting and getting muddy. In the evenings they would stay in local community facilities, where they would have entertainment and many activities for them to enjoy.

The Reason

There were several reasons for undertaking the Murray Darling Rescue:

- Linking Scouting with a recognizable project and image - it was recognized that Scouts Australia needed to build upon its image, and project a proactive organization, that energetically worked with the local community on important issues. The issue of the degraded health and sustainability of the Murray River and Darling River surrounding catchments affects many millions of people, and is an important environmental focus of the Australian government. By undertaking a project which aims at assisting the health of these river systems, Scouts Australia could generate a very positive image through direct involvement with people, and media coverage.
- Environmental degradation - over time there has been the loss of billions of trees, removed mainly for farming, which has caused the destruction of native plants and animals, degraded water quality, lack of soil fertility and the removal of vegetation which purifies air and captures carbon. These unsustainable land management practices affect more than 50,000 farms, 41% of Australia's gross agricultural production, and the drinking water of over 2 million people. These very important issues give rise to the need for positive action.

- Environmental education - in creating proactive citizens taking their place in society, it is important for Scouts to understand their natural world around them, why it needs to be looked after, and what they can do to help. This example of 'learning by doing' provides lasting memories for the more than 7,200 Scouts and friends and families who have been involved in this project so far. It teaches them the importance of tree planting – plus they have a lot of fun in the process!



Environmental issues are now a more significant part of the programme in Scouts Australia

The Learning

Scouts Australia have learnt that there can be many advantages to undertaking projects that directly deal with major issues affecting the community. It is important to have very clear communications with a corporate partner, who can provide great strengthening to a project for mutual benefit to both parties involved. Scouts can play an active role in taking proactive environmental action to improve the natural environment around them.

Our Future Plans

The Murray Darling Rescue continues to grow with annual plantings each year. It has now been incorporated into a larger Scouts Australia program 'Scouts Waterblitz' where Scouts across Australia are undertaking various projects to save water and improve the quality of our waterways. The project has at least six more years to run, and it is intended that millions more trees will be planted into the Murray Darling catchment in this time. Scouts Australia will continue to work on these sorts of projects and demonstrate to the wider community that 'A Scout cares for the environment'.

More information can be found at: www.murrayriverrescue.com.au



World Organization of the Scout Movement
Organisation Mondiale du Mouvement Scout



© 2005 World Scout Bureau, Geneva, Switzerland

Reproduction is authorized to National Scout Associations which are members of the World Organization of the Scout Movement. Others should request permission from the authors.

World Scout Bureau
P.O. Box 91, 1211 Geneva 4 Plainpalais
Switzerland

www.scout.org
worldbureau@world.scout.org