



## Ben Gawne-MWWG Executive Member Profile

Dr. Ben Gawne is well placed to contribute to the scientific understandings behind the decisions made by the NSW Murray Wetlands Working Group.

Ben, who has been the director of the Murray Darling Freshwater Research Centre (MDFRC) for the past six years, is a freshwater ecologist who understands all too well the problems faced by Australia's wetlands.

Ben grew up in Melbourne and did his undergraduate studies at Melbourne University, where he did his Bachelor of Science with an Honors project looking at the embryology of locusts. He then traveled and worked his way around Australia for two years before undertaking a PhD at Monash University, looking at the relationship between an aquatic invertebrate and its food in an upland stream near Marysville in Victoria.

After he completed his PhD he took up a post-doctorate role in Nebraska in the U.S.A. for three and a half years. Initially Ben was involved in a USA Navy funded research project to determine which coatings could be used to slow down attachment of algae, bacteria and other organisms to the bottom of ships. He also worked in the Missouri River looking at organic matter dynamics in response to a proposal to add old Christmas trees to the river as a way of adding carbon.

In 1996 he returned to Australia as Office-in-Charge of the newly-established Mildura laboratory for the MDRFC. Ben organized for the laboratory to be set up in a building provided by Lower Murray Water, built up a research portfolio, employed staff and developed relationships with local clients. During that time he conducted research work on the Menindee Lakes and the Murray River.

In 2002 he was appointed as MDRFC Director, based in Albury, *"and have been taking the Centre through some pretty major changes ever since"*, including relocating the Centre's laboratories and offices from Charles Sturt University's campus at Thurgoona to La Trobe University's campus at Wodonga in 2005. These days MDFRC is funded by CSIRO who contribute staff-in-kind, the Murray Darling Basin Commission who provide cash support, and LaTrobe University who provide employment services and two buildings. MDFRC employs about 45 people over its two laboratories.

Ben describes his role as director of the Centre as *"a multiple one. There's managing the relationship between the Centre and the outside world; being the public face of the Centre; the internal management and leadership role; and then developing the Centre's research portfolio which means being aware of what the MDBC and the CMAs challenges are and what they need doing."*

### CONTACT DETAILS:

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One of the major projects the MDRFC is involved in is a joint venture with the NSW Murray Wetlands Working Group looking at sulfidic sediments in wetlands in the hope of developing ways to respond to acidification.

Ben has been a member of the Murray Wetlands Working Group's executive since 2002.

*"Officially I am involved because I feel its part of my role as director of the MRDFC to build relationships with users of our knowledge so there's effective communication," he says.*

*"But the truth is that it is really rewarding to be involved with an organization that you can so clearly see the outcomes of its activities. The MWWG's values also mirror mine as we both believe that sustainable management isn't possible without good knowledge of how they function. The Group is using that knowledge to manage and rehabilitate wetlands. It's the application of research that I've been involved in and I'm actually seeing the outcomes."*

Ben and his partner live on a small property at Bethanga on the shores of Lake Hume with their two horses, two dogs and 15 sheep. Ben likes to take the dogs for a walk along the edge of the lake every morning.

*"Daily contact with the environment, seeing a pelican or whistling kite....help sustain me," he says.*



Ben Gawne

*"I try to help the MWWG through my knowledge and networks, for instance the Group may say 'We don't know 'x'' and I can take that on board and try to help. The sulfidic sediment project is a reflection of that. There was an obvious need the Group had, we have the expertise, and together we were able to get major funding from the Federal Government to work on the problem. It is a partnership that works well if it is done right." – Ben Gawne*

Executive member