

Partners/Sponsors Natural Heritage Trust, National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality, Mallee Catchment Management Authority, Lower Murray Water.
Monitoring Information 11 Groups, 214 participants, 13 sites. **Education Participation** 5632 participants.
Coordinators Darren Wilson, Fleur Johnson.



Mallee



Local issues, local solutions

When St Paul's Primary School heard that local irrigators were donating unused water entitlements to water thirsty River Red Gums, they were keen to get involved. The school decided to contribute 11 megalitres (11 million litres) from the school's own water right to Johnston's Bend, a Murray floodplain site in desperate need of water. For this group of committed 5/6 students and enthusiastic teacher, Mark Gibson, the school's donation was the start of an educational journey focusing on this major environmental issue in their own backyard.

Students gathered at Johnston's Bend in February around John Thwaites, Minister for Water and Environment, as the first few litres of donated water was pumped out onto the roots of thirsty gums. Seeing their contribution firsthand, the students contacted Mallee Waterwatch to see how else they could assist in the management of Johnston's Bend. With monitoring being a key component of the environmental watering project, Mallee Waterwatch trained students to undertake water quality monitoring and macroinvertebrate surveys. Students also monitored tree health and epicormic budding.

Students researched environmental watering, and also made a number of field trips to the site to see the response of the water. The school prepared a number of media releases, and provided an informative display at the 'Thank you Day' held for those individuals and organisations who donated water.

Months of preparation saw students develop an interactive workshop, including a 'Who wants to be a millionaire' style quiz focusing on the importance of River Red Gums to the Murray River floodplain and the outcomes of environmental watering. Students presented their findings to hundreds of students at the International River Health Conference in October.

"Even after the conference, kids were still visiting the site with their families, and noticing different changes like frogs and birds" said teacher Mark Gibson. **"A project like the River Red Gum watering that is real to their area, and in the newspaper all the time, means the students now have a genuine interest which will continue on into the future."**

"The kids said 'you can't blame people in the past for what's happened, we have just got to do something about it now'. It was really good to see them trying to find answers themselves." recalled teacher Mark Gibson.



Top St Paul's Primary School students join John Thwaites MP, Minister for Water and Environment, to start the emergency watering of River Red Gums. **Above** Floodplain River Red Gums were struggling before the emergency watering, but have flourished with new growth since.