

Thursday August 2, 2007

## Fresh from the Ovens: Community speaks up for a healthy Ovens River

The Ovens River plays a vital role in the lives and prosperity of Victoria's north eastern communities who want the river protected for future generations, a community project by Environment Victoria has found.

Environment Victoria's 'Your River' project will be launched this Sunday August 5 by local Bright chef and local identity, Patrizia Simone, at an afternoon celebration at Boynton's Winery in Porepunkah,

The project profiles a range of people who live, work and play along the Ovens River and demonstrates the importance of a healthy river to the vibrancy, prosperity and future of the region.

Environment Victoria's Healthy Rivers Community Campaigner Leonie Duncan said the 'Your River' project reveals that people throughout the Ovens catchment recognise the need to speak up for the river they love and depend on and are taking practical action to care for the river's health.

"Abundant life and the region's prosperity all rely on the Ovens River," Ms Duncan said. "From its alpine source to its fertile floodplain valley, the Ovens River gives life to the region's food and tourism industries."

"The Ovens is one of our state's greatest rivers," Ms Duncan adds.

"The river red gum forests and wetlands of the heritage-listed Lower Ovens provide vital habitat for threatened wildlife such as Squirrel Glider, Royal Spoonbill and the iconic Murray Cod. The Ovens River is the last remaining free-flowing Victorian river feeding into the Murray."

"Recent assessments have found 75% of the Murray floodplain's river red gums are dead or dying. Protecting the Ovens River naturally high flows are a key part of restoring the Murray River system. When the environment has its share of water protected we'll have a Murray that all Victorians can be proud of."

Sunday's project launch will include samplings of the region's food and wine; a digital art exhibition with contributions from over 30 artists; an address by freshwater ecologist Terry Hillman; and the presentation of an artist-illustrated map highlighting the cultural and environmental significance of the Ovens River. The event is hosted by Environment Victoria, with support from North East Catchment Management Authority.

Check out the full *Your River* stories and photos at [www.environmentvictoria.org.au](http://www.environmentvictoria.org.au), including:

- > Bright chef **Patrizia Simone** who see the Ovens River as a major drawcard for the region's tourists
- > Waterwatch participants **Boorhaman Primary School** for whom the river is favourite place to play
- > Wangaratta artist **Trish Gallagher** who coordinated a multi-media exhibition celebrating the river
- > Fish ecologist **Bill O'Connor** whose research has helped uncover the secret life of Murray Cod
- > Former tobacco farmer **Carmello Leggio and son Jon**, whose Ovens property is bisected by the river
- > Everton local **Leigh Ferguson** who has seen many changes during his 40 year career in river management

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