

FOUR BEAUTIFUL SEASONS TWELVE FANTASTIC MONTHS ONE VERY BIG YEAR



Adrian Brown: Kumuwuki, Big Wave

This is the text of an address delivered by *One River* Reference Group member Adrian Brown at first of three *One River* Symposia, presented under the banner of *Undercurrents*. This session was held in Goolwa SA, as part of the Regional Arts Australia national biennial conference *Kumuwuki*.

20 Oct 2012, Uniting Church Hall, Collingwood Street, Goolwa

I'd like to start by paying my respects to the Ngarrindjeri Elders and the people and thank them for sharing this beautiful place with us. I'm just so amazed at how nice it is down here. I'm looking forward to going out and talking to Uncle Tom and Uncle Moogy tomorrow around the Coorong and listening to some of their stories.

As Malcolm said, I'm a Ngunnawal man and I'm a very proud Ngunnawal man. I grew up in Queanbeyan which is just outside Canberra. I was very fortunate as a young man to be taken out by my father and my uncles and fish and practise those methods on the river and spend a bit of time talking about stories and who we are and how we belonged to that whole system and our stories and our culture.

I want to start off by talking about the word Murrumbidgee and what it means. 'Murrum' in our language means pathway and 'Bidgee' means boss, so it's a pathway for bosses and through law, our people, that's what they did. They went up that river and spoke about different types of land management practices and methods and how they could improve things or make things better for people all up and down the whole river system.

One of the things I want to talk about is land management. I find people are curious about how we practised our land management. One of the stories I always tell is about the kangaroo and the grass parrot – it's quite a simple story. When we go through ceremony and initiation we are given responsibilities, so one child might be given the responsibility for a kangaroo and how to manage and how to look after that kangaroo. Another young kid might be given the responsibility of a grass parrot. There is actually a marriage or a relationship between these two animals, and it's grass. If the kangaroos are eating too much grass, then the grass parrot has got nowhere to live and no grass seed to eat. So through that management system, what people are taught is that they can watch and monitor what's going on and say to each other, "There are too many kangaroos," and take some out. So they are practising land management.

You can think of that similar relationship between an ant all the way up to a wedge tail eagle. What type of relationships are going on between those animals all the way through. It's quite complex but that's why you have a system, that's why you have a way of understanding and practising land management.

I think it would be great if it was something that was taught in schools, teach our young children about giving them a responsibility, and say, that's yours, to look after.

One River is a Centenary of Canberra project, proudly supported by the ACT Government and the Australian Government.



If we could manage our country like that with that better understanding I think we can improve our waterways and the whole landscape, have that energy with the land, so we become part of it.

We are all responsible. Today, the way we do things, we think in isolation, we're always worried about ourselves and what we can get from resources, and we're not thinking about our neighbours and our friends. A simple thing, in the old days, if there was a dead animal in the water, you would pull it out. We were always thinking about our neighbours and what's going on downstream, so they keep getting good water.

I think we're lucky in Canberra, we're right up the top. We're right in the mountains and what we receive up there is really nice fresh rain water and we get a lot of snow melt that comes down as well.

One of the things we should think about and discuss more is formal rights about land management and water management and how we can engage Aboriginal people into those systems so we can provide more of a voice and provide more opportunities for Aboriginal people to tell their stories and tell how they manage country and how they look after it. I think we can integrate it. I don't think we are looking for a dominant change to come back to our old ways. But I think if we look at the way we are doing things we can do things better if we do them together.

I'm looking forward through this project working with all the mobs from up and down the rivers about telling that story, similar to my story I told about Murrumbidgee and what it means to us, I'm really keen to hear their stories, from the Coorong, the Murray and the Darling and what it means to these people down here.

Through this project, there will be some great stories told, and I'm keen for us to document them so we can let everyone listen to them.

Thanks very much. When we get to have an open discussion I'd be honoured to answer some questions and give you a bit more perspective about Aboriginal land management and how we can improve the way we manage the rivers.

Thank you.

CONTACTS FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Lindy Allen 0439 999 248 executiveproducer@oneriver.com.au

Malcolm McKinnon 0427 462 946 recklesseye@bigpond.com