



## A River Flows Through It



### **Cultural and Environmental Rehabilitation of the Old Roelands Mission Collie River Foreshore – Woolkabunning Kiaka Association, Roelands.**

The river itself has significant spiritual and cultural importance, tied strongly to dreaming stories of local Noongar people.

### **A Significant Project**

The section of the Collie River that runs along the edge of the old Roeland's Mission has multiple dimensions of significance for Noongar people.

Located 25km north of Bunbury, the former Mission housed Aboriginal children who had been

removed from their families, from the 1940's all the way through to the 1970's. During that period an estimated 500 children were placed at the Mission, some of whom spent 16 years of their life there.

While many of the memories of the Mission's former residents are of disconnection, homesickness and loss, there are also memories of camaraderie and deep friendships forged with other children. The river, where the children sometimes swam, holds particular fond memories.

The river itself has significant spiritual and cultural importance, tied strongly to dreaming stories of local Noongar people and in times past the river, its banks and its floodplains were a rich source of bush tucker and bush medicines.



*Commencement of re-fencing works to protect the river.*



*Neighbour's cattle now excluded from the river area.*

While the over storey vegetation is predominantly intact and in good condition, the understorey along the waterway is largely absent.

After detailed discussions, Woolkabunning Kiaka Association's representative and Roelands Caretaker, Mr. Les Wallam and SWCC determined that the site would be a suitable candidate for funding under SWCC's Aboriginal Partnership Project, coordinated by Aboriginal NRM Facilitator Zac Webb.

## Scope of the Project

It is easy to understand why the Woolkabunning Kiaka Association, which now runs the property on behalf of the Indigenous Land Corporation (ILC) [who purchased the property in 2004] sees the river as a priority for rehabilitation work.

Both during and after its time as a Mission, the property has been used for agricultural purposes, including irrigated agriculture and cattle grazing. As a result, the river has been degraded by cattle access and the site infested by weeds, including blackberry.



*Evidence of grazing pressure from cattle.*



*Following re-fencing, weed control and planting was completed through the Autumn and Winter of 2011.*

## Works Underway

The project that emerged was the rehabilitation of an 800m stretch of the banks of the Collie River, with the long term aim for the site being its inclusion as part of a future cultural education and eco-tourism program for the Roelands area. As such the plant species that were chosen for planting have included both medicinal and bush tucker plants.



*Ultimately, the river bank area will be included as part of a future cultural education program*



*The site was replanted with both medicinal and bush tucker plants.*

The Woolkabunning Kiaka Association fenced the stretch of river off in 2011 and with the assistance from the Noongar Employment and Enterprise Development Aboriginal Corporation (NEEDAC) and local Traditional Owners, the Woolkabunning Kiaka Association successfully completed the weeding and planting through the Autumn and Winter of 2011.



*Part of the section referenced by the Woolkabunning Kiaka Association.*

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Local Nyungar works crew and a local farmer working together to protect the Collie River.

## Looking Forward

The next door neighbours even got involved! With assistance and facilitation from Zac, they fenced the river on the opposite bank to prevent their cattle from accessing the site, to ensure that the works completed at Roelands are successful into the longer term.

Even in a degraded state, the site is picturesque, and one can imagine that once the native understorey has retaken a foothold over the weeds that this site will once again provide an important interface with the Collie River for Traditional Owners and visitors to Roelands alike.



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