The Murray Hardyhead’s story

My name is Iain Ellis, I’m a Fish Biologist at the Murray Darling River Research Centre, which is a partner of La Trobe University and I work out of Mildura in north-west Victoria on the Murray River.   
The Murray River is part of the Murray Darling Basin. It’s the longest river system on the continent and it’s referred to as the food bowl of Australia where a lot of agriculture is based.

We need a healthy river system because a river is essentially the life blood of our society as well as the environment that we live in. Without a healthy river system we don’t have clean fresh water, we don’t have a lot of the animals and plants that form part of the food group that we are in, that we are part of and it’s in decline and we need to reverse that.

So I do a lot of work on a species called the Murray Hardyhead. It’s a small fish less than 9cm long. They form a very important link in the food web. They are food for birds and larger fish and turtles and so forth. Species like them have evolved in an ecosystem and without them thee ecosystem might crash.

My name is Jimmy McDougal and I run a little restaurant here in Mildura called Stefano’s and I would say that the restaurant wouldn’t be there if it wasn’t for the Murray River. That was the inspiration for the restaurant actually being open. Wild yabbies, wild Murray cod and all that sort of stuff. We’ve really made the produce from this area really the star so we basically don’t source anything from more than 20 or 40 kilometres from the Murray River.   
The beef, rabbits, kanagaroos, the whole works.   
Things just grow here where you wouldn’t see them grow anywhere else. It’s an interesting ecosystem, it’s a one stop shop like a supermarket here.   
Without the river there would be no story in the restaurant, it just wouldn’t work and it wouldn’t make sense. The cuisine couldn’t come out of Mildura, it would be somewhere else and it wouldn’t have any integrity.

I think the research La Trobe is doing is really important to the river system. Just to get that native ecosystem back to what it should be. The Murray River is the life blood of Mildura .

The MDFRC where I work along with La Trobe. A lot of our focus is on how we use the environmental water that’s been purchased for these ecosystems to make sure that it’s not wasted and that when we do use precious water, and it is precious, that it goes to the appropriate locations at the right time.   
The future actually looks pretty good for the first time in a while. It’s been bleak for a long time but I think we recognise as a society now that the Murray Darling Basin in particular is very degraded, it needs attention. So it’s through our research that we can create a more healthy river and a healthier river is beneficial to the communities that live along it. Everybody along the river, both irrigators and people who just choose to live in this part of the world.

Everybody is a beneficiary from the research we’re doing.