

River Revolution: Accelerating Solutions for Climate Resilience


International
River Symposium
Brisbane 2025

8 - 10 September 2025
Brisbane, Australia

Symposium Program

www.riverfoundation.org.au

REGISTER NOW



Event Partner **Brisbane Festival**



The International River Symposium (IRS) emerged from the Brisbane Festival. First held in 1998, the IRS was a signature event with a key goal to raise environmental awareness.

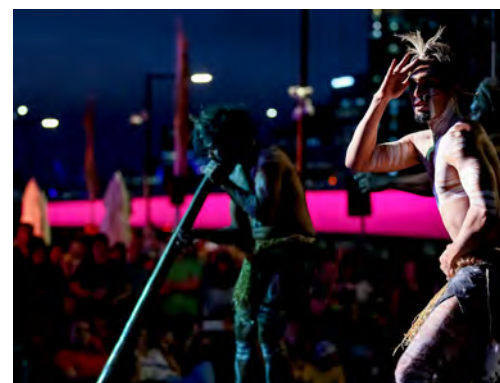
Over twenty-five years later, the IRS has transformed into a world-renowned thought-leadership forum, uniting global river leaders to accelerate solutions and action for our waterways.

Returning to its roots, in 2025 the IRS will be held in partnership with Brisbane Festival, Brisbane's biggest cultural event. Working towards embedding environmental sustainability across everything it does, Brisbane Festival is unlike anything else you can experience in the world. The event redefines what an International Arts Festival looks and feels like, staying ahead of the game and bringing the next generation with it.

The river and iconic city landmarks are Brisbane Festival's stage, with Riverfire marking the opening of the festival – and now the IRS.

We are proud to align with this iconic event and amplify the world's focus on our river. We look forward to welcoming you to the River City of Brisbane in 2025.

Image credits: Brisbane Festival



IRS 2025

Program at a glance

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Monday 8 September

09:00 - 17:00	Capacity Development Master Classes
09:00 - 13:00	Special Youth 'Riverpreneurs' Program
18:00 - 21:00	Welcome Function Hosted by the Council of Mayors South East Queensland

Tuesday 9 September

08:00 - 10:20	Welcome Ceremony, Opening Keynote Presentations and Plenary Panel
10:20 - 10:40	River Pitch
10:40 - 11:10	Morning Tea, Networking and Riverwalk Marketplace
11:10 - 12:10	River Lab Breakout Sessions
12:15 - 13:15	River Dialogue and River X Breakout Sessions
13:15 - 14:15	Lunch, Networking and Riverwalk Marketplace
14:20 - 15:20	River Dialogue and River X Breakout Sessions
15:20 - 15:50	Afternoon Tea, Networking and Riverwalk Marketplace
15:50 - 17:20	Closing Keynotes and Day One Summary

Wednesday 10 September

07:00 - 08:00	Thought Leadership Breakfast
08:30 - 10:45	Day 1 Synthesis, Day 2 Outlook, Opening Keynote Presentations and Plenary Panel
10:45 - 11:15	Morning Tea, Networking and Riverwalk Marketplace
11:15 - 12:15	River Lab Breakout Sessions
12:15 - 12:45	River Dialogue and River X Breakout Sessions
12:45 - 13:30	Lunch, Networking and Riverwalk Marketplace
13:30 - 15:10	River Dialogue and River X Breakout Sessions
15:10 - 15:40	Afternoon Tea, Networking and Riverwalk Marketplace
15:45 - 17:15	Closing Keynote Discussions, Summation Panel, Thank You and Next Steps
19:00 - 23:00	Gala Dinner and Awarding of the 2025 Thiess International River Prize

Beyond the Sessions

Connect, Collaborate and Celebrate

Our curated social and optional events offer the perfect setting to deepen relationships, exchange ideas, and engage with the passionate minds leading river restoration across the globe.



Welcome Reception

Proudly sponsored by the Council of Mayors (SEQ)

Monday, 8 September, 5:30pm

Room 360, Queensland University of Technology

Kick off the Symposium with 360 degrees of inspiration! Join us high above the Brisbane skyline at Room 360, where panoramic views of the Brisbane River set the perfect scene for networking and reconnecting. This casual yet elegant gathering is your first opportunity to meet fellow delegates, speakers and partners in a relaxed environment.



Gala Dinner and Thiess International River Prize Awards

Proudly sponsored by the University of Queensland

Wednesday, 10 September, 6:30pm | The Star Grand Ballroom

Celebrate the culmination of the Symposium at our most prestigious event — the presentation of the Thiess International River Prize. This elegant evening brings together global river leaders, distinguished guests and award finalists for a night of inspiration, recognition and entertainment.

Enjoy fine dining, and a spectacular celebration of innovation and impact in river restoration.



Riverwalk Marketplace

Daily access throughout the Symposium

Elevate your experience at IRS 2025 by wandering the Riverwalk Marketplace, a vibrant hub to engage, connect, and be inspired. This immersive space brings river stories to life with dynamic showcases of impactful projects and innovations in resilience. Immerse yourself in the spirit of river life, engage with passionate organisations, and discover how you can contribute to river protection. Don't miss the chance to connect at the Riverwalk Marketplace, where the future of our rivers begins!

Meet the IRS 2025 Keynote Speakers



Dr Simon Banks

Commonwealth Environmental
Water Holder

With oversight of nearly 3,000 GL of annual water licences for the Australian Government, Dr Banks leads one of the most significant environmental water management programs in the world, protecting the rivers, wetlands and floodplains of the Murray-Darling Basin.



Dr Pierre Baril

Canadian Commissioner
and Chair, International Joint
Commission

Dr Baril brings over two decades of leadership in environmental governance. He has held executive roles across Québec's climate, water and environment sectors, most recently leading a team dedicated to modernizing environmental regulations.



Dr Stuart Orr

Previously WWF's Global Freshwater Lead, Dr Orr has spent his career highlighting the diverse values of healthy rivers, devising and testing innovative approaches to freshwater conservation by engaging business and finance, and focusing on emerging themes such as the water-food-energy nexus, economic incentives, bankable financing and water-related risk.



Salvador Rico

Founder, Saving the Rivers of
the World

Having over a decade of leadership in Rotary International and a deep passion for community-driven change, Salvador has catalysed river clean-up projects across continents, inspiring thousands to act locally and think globally.



Qingfeng Zhang

Senior Director for Agriculture,
Food, Nature, and Rural
Development Sector Office,
Asian Development Bank

Possessing decades of experience spanning sustainable agriculture, natural resources, and climate resilience, Qingfeng will address the pressing challenges and opportunities facing river systems and their role in adaptation pathways toward food security.



Dr Siwan Lovett

Australian River Restoration
Centre

With over 30 years' experience in river restoration, Dr Lovett is a true leader in the sector. From riparian rehabilitation to empowering others through communications and leadership, her work is underpinned by the belief that rivers and people need each other to thrive.



Dr James Fitzsimons

The Nature Conservancy

A leading voice in global conservation, Dr Fitzsimons is at the forefront of advancing the 30x30 protection target and goals of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

Daily Schedule

Monday 8 September

REGISTER NOW

	Moreton Room	Kangaroo Point Room	Mt Coot Tha Room
09:00			
10:00	Master Class 1 Resilient Rivers: Harnessing the power of regional collaboration for real-world impact Hosted by the Council of Mayors South East Queensland	Master Class 2 Reimagining River Governance: Collaborative Systems Approaches to Integrated Catchment Hosted by Systems Collaboration Partners	Master Class 3 Hosted by The University of Queensland
11:00			
12:00			
13:00	Lunch and Networking		
14:00	Master Class 4 25 Years of Water Wisdom: The Report Card that Started Them All in Constant Innovation Hosted by Healthy Land and Water	Master Class 5 Flood Resilience Futures: Flood CoP and Water Technology Hosted by Dr Piet Filet, Steve Clark and Tony McAlister	Master Class 6 Ecological Healthy Rivers Support Sustainable Social Development Hosted by the Asia River Restoration Network
15:00			
16:00			
17:00			
18:00 - 21:00 Welcome Function Event at Room 360, Queensland University of Technology Hosted by the Council of Mayors South East Queensland			

Continuing Professional Development Master Class Spotlight

Resilient Rivers: Harnessing the Power of Regional Collaboration for Real-World Impact

*Monday, 8 September, 9:00 - 12:30
Mount Coot-Tha Room, The Star Brisbane*

Sponsored and facilitated by the Council of Mayors (SEQ)



In South East Queensland, Government, industry, science and community have joined forces in Resilient Rivers SEQ, a coordinated catchment management initiative revitalising the region's 16,000 kilometres of rivers and waterways.

This Master Class explores:

- How regional collaboration across 11 councils is underpinned by strong governance to enable coordinated on-ground solutions.
- Using a whole-of-system, values-based approach to account for the different values, management needs, and priorities of stakeholders and beneficiaries.
- Insights into the enablers and challenges of implementing on-ground interventions.

This session is designed for industry professionals, researchers and decision-makers seeking to harness the power of partnerships to create lasting, sustainable impact.

Reimagining River Governance: Collaborative Systems Approaches to Integrated Catchment Management

*Monday, 8 September, 9:00 - 12:30
Moreton Room, The Star Brisbane*

Sponsored and facilitated by Systems Collaboration Partners



Healthy river systems require stewardship, engagement and commitment of diverse partners and communities who often have conflicting needs. This experiential masterclass offers river leaders, policymakers and practitioners systems perspectives and practical collaboration approaches to move from fragmented effort to coordinated systems-level action.

This Master Class explores:

- The fundamentals of systems thinking and its application in river management.
- Effective collaborative processes that engage stakeholders and foster collective action.
- Innovative strategies for enhancing governance at the catchment level.
- The concept of the 'deep story' and its influence on complex systems.
- Practical tools for building strong networks and driving impactful change.

Daily Schedule

Tuesday 9 September

REGISTER NOW

08:00	<p>Welcome to Country and Cultural Presentation</p> <p>Opening Addresses and Welcome from Government Representatives</p>			
08:30	<p>Official Opening and Address from IRF Chair Michael Wright</p> <p>Keynote Water for Our Environment Dr Simon Banks, Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder (CEWH)</p> <p>Keynote Protecting our Shared Waters, Together: Insights on River Governance Dr Pierre Baril, International Joint Commission</p>			
09:00	<p>Keynote Panel Tourism, Ports & Rivers – Prosperity through Resilience Steve Richards, AmaWaterways Neil Stephens, Port of Brisbane DG Patricia O'Callaghan, Department of Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation Luke Fraser, Howard Smith Wharves John Sharpe, Riverlife</p>			
09:30				
10:00				
10:30	<p>River Pitch for Sponsors in Riverwalk Marketplace</p> <p>Morning Tea, Networking and Riverwalk Marketplace</p>			
11:00	<p>Teneriffe 1</p> <p>River Lab 1 Murray Darling River Basin Plan Sponsored by the Murray-Darling Basin Authority Facilitator: Tim Goode</p>	<p>Teneriffe 2</p> <p>River Lab 2 Plastic Rivers and Emerging Contaminants <i>Follow on from Satellite Event #3</i></p>	<p>Paddington 1</p> <p>River Lab 3 River Cities Sponsored by Brisbane City Council Facilitator: Dr Eva Abal, International River Foundation</p>	<p>Paddington 2</p> <p>River Lab 4 What it Takes to be a River and Water Leader Sponsored by International Water Centre Facilitators: Prof Regina Souter and Prof Brian McIntosh</p>
11:30				
12:00	<p>Stream 1 Rivers at the Heart of Resilience</p>	<p>Stream 2 Basin Cities and Urban Rivers</p>	<p>Stream 3 Innovation in River Governance</p>	<p>River X Stream</p>
12:30	<p>Braided River Revival Sarah Worthington and Greg Stanley (New Zealand)</p>	<p>Activating Our Riverbanks: The South Bank Experience Toby Lodge (Australia)</p>	<p>Building Diverse Coalitions for River Protection: Queensland's Channel Country Riley Rocco, Co-Author Josh Gorrington (Australia)</p>	<p>Embracing Riverine Dynamics to Promote Resilience, Kuei-Hsien Liao (Taiwan Republic of China) Improving Community Resilience in the Tenthill Catchment, Queensland, Chris Hoffman (Australia)</p>

Daily Schedule

Tuesday 9 September

Continued

REGISTER NOW

	Stream 1 Rivers at the Heart of Resilience	Stream 2 Basin Cities and Urban Rivers	Stream 3 Innovation in River Governance	River X Stream
13:00	Teneriffe 1 Minimal Intervention River Naturalisation Dr George Heritage and Pete Evoy (UK)	Teneriffe 2 The Parramatta River's Legacy: Industrial Past, Recreational Future Alexi Gilchrist and Hannah McNight (Australia)	Paddington 1 Assessing Climate Risks to Water Resources of Southern NSW Aaron Matsinos (Australia)	Paddington 2 Delivering Environmental and Cultural Flows, Jennifer Munro (Australia) Advancing IWRM through Japan's Revised Water Cycle Basin Plan, Yumiko Asayama (Japan)
13:30	Lunch, Networking and Riverwalk Marketplace			
14:00				
14:30	A Quantitative Barrier Mitigation Prioritisation Method to Support River Resilience James Shelley (Australia)	Defining Best Practice Water Resource Planning Barry Hart, William Moulden and Phil Duncan (Australia)	Mekong SOS – Understanding the Safe Operating Space for a Transboundary River in the Anthropocene Tarek Ketelsen (Australia)	Effects and Implementation of the River and Lake Chief System in China, Xiao Chen (China) Mini Report Cards, Major Impact: Fostering Youth Stewardship in the Fitzroy Basin, Josh McKee and Tim Kendrick (Australia)
15:00	Riverine Initiatives - Integrating Traditional Knowledge with Threatened Species Conservation Efforts Tom Espinoza (Australia) Sponsored by Burnett Mary Regional Group (BMRG)	Reviving Urban Creeks: Enhancing Biodiversity and Community Action for River Resilience Chen Chi-Nung (Taiwan Republic of China)	A Collaborative Approach to Reporting on the Great Barrier Reef Catchment Loads Monitoring Program Justin Mendelow and Angela Marsh (Australia)	Ground-to-Space Sensor Network for Water Quality Monitoring in the Fitzroy River Estuary, Florina Richard (Australia) Effects and Implementation of the River and Lake Chief System in China, Xiaoyong Liu (China)
15:30	Afternoon Tea, Networking and Riverwalk Marketplace			
16:00	Plenary Panel: Interweaving River Champions			
16:30	Closing Keynote River Clean Up Programs - Crossing Continents (Showcasing the Rotary - UNEP Initiative, Community Action for Fresh Water) Salvador Rico, Rotary International			
17:00	Day 1 Summary and Closing			

Symposium Satellite Event Series

Keynote Speakers

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Benjamin Raigneau
City of Paris



Mina Guli
Thirst Foundation



Elizabeth Sisson
Brisbane City Council



Rebecca Arnaud
Brisbane City Council



Prof Bill Dennison
University of Maryland



Steve Richards
AmaWaterways



Dr Stuart Orr
World Wide Fund for Nature



Prof Ian Rutherford
Alluvium Foundation and University of Melbourne



Bart Fokkens
European Centre for River Restoration



Dr Siwan Lovett
Australian River Restoration Centre



Prof Fengran Xu
China Institute of Water Resources and Hydropower Research



Dr Karin Olsson
County Administrative Board of Scania



Dr Jo Burton
Resilient Rivers South East Queensland



Salvador Rico
Rotary International



Martin Janes
The River Restoration Centre



Scott Shipley
Calibre Engineering



Prof Anne Roiko
WaterNSW



Prof Thava Palnisami
University of Newcastle



Dr Cheng Zhang
University of Queensland



Dr Salom Vincent
University of Kerala



Jeanne Samayoa
Alliance for the Motagua Basin



Neha Madappa
ANZPAC Plastics Pact Program, APCO



Yohanes Agustian
Thiess

Daily Schedule

Wednesday 10 September

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	07:00 - 08:00 Thought Leadership Networking Breakfast			
08:30	Day 1 Synthesis and Day 2 Preview			
09:00	Keynote Financing River Restoration: Global Perspectives and Initiatives Dr Stuart Orr			
09:30	Keynote Natural Capital Investments - Protecting River Ecosystems and Financing Long-term Food Security Qingfeng Zhang, Asian Development Bank			
10:00	Keynote Alone We Can Do a Little, But Together We Can Do a Lot Dr Siwan Lovett, Australian River Restoration Centre			
10:30	Bookend Keynote			
11:00	Morning Tea, Networking and Riverwalk Marketplace			
11:30	Teneriffe 1 River Lab 5 Swimmable Rivers - Olympic Rivers Sponsored by AmaWaterways Facilitated by Rhyl Jones McCoy	Teneriffe 2 River Lab 6 River Restoration: Restore our Rivers Faster and Better Facilitated by Bart Fokkens and Dr Siwan Lovett	Paddington 1 River Lab 7 Flow Mer Sponsored by the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder (CEWH)	Paddington 2 River Lab 8 Nature Based Solutions and Environmental Markets for River Resilience
12:00				
12:30	Stream 4 Rivers of Tomorrow Sponsored by AmaWaterways	Stream 5 Community and Youth Led Solutions	Stream 6 Innovative Finance and Rivers to Raw Plate	River X Stream
13:00	Characterising Severe Droughts in Yellow River Basin Through Water Balance Yusheng Wang and Dr Jinjun You (China)	What is the seed of the water? Jose Antonio Fernandez Lopez-Lavalle (Peru/Spain)	Restoration of 75 smaller Rivers of Ganga Basin Dr Dutta Venkatesh (India)	Rethinking Water Governance in Chile Under Extreme Climate Scenarios, Pablo Aranda Valenzuela (Australia) Improving Community Resilience in the Tenthill Catchment, Queensland, Justine Rice and Chris Hoffman (Australia)
13:30	Lunch, Networking and Riverwalk Marketplace			

Daily Schedule

Wednesday 10 September

Continued

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	Stream 4 Rivers of Tomorrow Sponsored by AmaWaterways	Stream 5 Community and Youth Led Solutions	Stream 6 Innovative Finance and Rivers to Raw Plate	River X Stream
	Teneriffe 1	Teneriffe 2	Paddington 1	Paddington 2
13:30	Nature-based solutions for the Brisbane River during floods Dr Joseph McMahon (Australia)	The Tweed Kenya Mentoring Program Pipeline Project Megan Dale and Tom Alletson (Australia)	Is Offsetting an Option? The Lake Simcoe Example Robert Baldwin (Canada)	LIDAR-Based Method for Precise Mapping of Water Storage Boundaries, Lasinidum Jayarathna (Australia)
14:00	Improving the Health of the Upper Murrumbidgee Caitie Jones and Pete Pfitzner (Australia)	River Care Pro Environmental Behavior of Local Community Groups and Urban River Health Sathis Venkitasamy (Malaysia)	Harnessing Investment in Water Quality: Unlocking Private Finance Amy Basnett (Australia)	Progress, Achievements, and Related Issues in the Construction of Happy Rivers and Lakes in China, Xiangqian Dai (China)
14:30	Global Wetland Watch: A System for Worldwide Wetland Mapping and Monitoring Christian Tottrup, Stefan Paul Szylkarski and Daniel Druce (Australia)	Behavioral Science and River Resilience Sam Moore (Australia)	River Dialogue 24	Assessing Climate Resilience of Kedron Brook using Geomorphology and River Styles Framework, Chamantha Thapaththu (Australia)
15:00	Sponsored by AmaWaterways			Riparian Impact on Water Quality in the Herbert, Payton Te Ngaio (Australia) Let's Consider the Bigger Picture, Glenn Browning (Australia)
15:30	Afternoon Tea, Networking and Riverwalk Marketplace			
16:00	Keynote Panel Discussion Celebrating Excellence: Our Nobel Prize Winners for Our Rivers Rob Baldwin (Lake Simcoe, Canada) George Heritage (Cumbria River, UK) Brian Mast (San Antonio, USA) Dr Deb Nias (Murray Wetlands, Australia) Nick Edgar (Aorere River, New Zealand)			
16:30	Closing Keynote The International Biodiversity Agenda: World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and Freshwater Challenge Partners James Fitzsimons , The Nature Conservancy (TNC)			
17:00	Farewell Remarks Jodie Bignall, Prof Bill Dennison, Philip Weller and Michael Wright International River Foundation			
19:00 - 23:00 Gala Dinner and Thiess International River Prize Awards The Star Ballroom Dress: Black Tie or Cultural Attire				

Insights From Previous IRS Speakers



Rivers are the lifeblood of communities, cities and industries around the world, but they are facing significant challenges. Let us continue to work together to ensure our rivers are there for future generations.

Adrian Schinnerer
Lord Mayor of Brisbane



If the world continues to undervalue and overlook rivers, then we can kiss goodbye to tackling our climate and nature crises. It is time for the world to wake up to rivers.

Dr Stuart Orr
World Wide Fund for Nature



We need to focus on the 'water part' of climate change. It is important to look at both protection and restoration. We need to hold each other accountable as we move forward.

Dr Nicole Silk
The Nature Conservancy



To save the Mekong by 2030, four fundamental shifts are needed: proactive regional planning, coordination and management of water infrastructures, consolidation and modernisation of decision support systems, and enhancement of entire basin management arrangement.

Dr Anoulak Kittikhoun
Mekong River Commission



The pandemic has shown us that working together (tightly knitted cooperation and constructed involvement of all actors) can make a difference in addressing the key challenges that our rivers are facing. We need to unite towards a common water agenda.

Veronica Manfredi
European Commission



We have learned much in the last 13 years about how to manage water for the environment and how to achieve resilient rivers for resilient communities. But there is still more to do to manage water for the environment. We must keep adapting. We need to travel this journey to resilience together.

Dr Simon Banks
Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder



To protect a river, one needs to ensure that we protect it every single day thereafter. Let us use our collective businesses to save our home planet.

Ryan Gellert
Patagonia



The world is experiencing a water crisis. Drought, flooding or pollution are how most of us will experience this climate emergency – yet water is often missing from global conversations.

Mina Guli
Thirst Foundation



The unprecedented biodiversity and water and pollution crisis facing the planet require us to step up actions and find smarter, faster, and more cooperative ways to tackle the compounding problems.

Dr Carlos Manuel Rodriguez
Global Environment Facility

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