

River Revolution: Accelerating Solutions for Climate Resilience


International
River Symposium
Brisbane 2025

8 - 10 September 2025
Brisbane, Australia

Report to Partners



www.riverfoundation.org.au

Acknowledgement of Country

The International River Foundation acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands on which the 26th International River Symposium was held, the Turrbal and Jagera People.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging who continue cultural and spiritual connections to Country. We recognise their valuable contributions to our rivers and our environment.

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Making it happen



Thank you for joining the river revolution

On behalf of the International River Foundation (IRF) Board and team, we extend our deepest gratitude and heartfelt thanks to you; our partners, sponsors, donors, speakers and delegates, for your valued support of 26th International River Symposium (IRS) 2025, hosted in our home town river city of Brisbane.

Under the theme 'River Revolution: Accelerating Solutions for Climate Resilience', across three days, this year's reimagined Symposium provided an opportunity to hear from over 100 speakers across 70 thought leadership sessions, including capacity-building Masterclasses, hands on River Dialogue workshops and a Youth 'Riverpitch' Innovation Challenge.

Thanks to your generosity, we were able to unite over 500 of the world's best river leaders from 22 countries across science, academia, community, NGOs, government and industry, helping drive real-world impact by connecting best practice with knowledge, skills and experience.

The week culminated in a night of celebration at the Gala Dinner, recognising the incredible leaders, inspiring activists, brilliant innovators and forward-thinking communities making a difference for our world's rivers. We acknowledged the extraordinary contribution of the Tweed Shire Council's 20+ years of impact delivered to transform the health of thousands of lives in Western Kenya by providing access to safe water and sanitation through the Tweed Kenya Mentoring Program.

The highlight of the celebrations was the awarding of the 22nd Thies International River Prize, championing best practice in river restoration, protection and management. Congratulations to the Chicago River who took home this year's prize, awarded in recognition of a 45+ year legacy of transforming the 251 kilometre Chicago-Calumet River system into a healthy, biodiverse and climate-resilient ecosystem for both people and wildlife.

Acknowledging entrants from all around the world, we would especially like to thank the 2025 finalists from the Cumbria Rivers (UK), Klamath River (USA) and the Vjosa River (Albania), who travelled far and wide to share their positive impact and inspire action.

Off the back of global recognition of these incredible projects, in November, we continued our Symposium Satellite Event series by hosting a special Global River Champions Satellite Event. This was a platform to share learnings and highlight game-changing solutions, amplifying these stories to new audiences around the world. We are excited to extend this series in 2026 and would like to pay special thanks to our valued sponsors for their continued support in making this happen.

None of this would have been possible without you, and we would like to especially thank our Principal Partners, Brisbane City Council and Thies, for their long-standing support of the IRS and IRF. Events like this are where ideas are shaped, collaborations are born, and practical action ignites.

This momentum now carries us towards the 27th IRS, a pivotal milestone in the lead-up to the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games, providing an opportunity to build a legacy of world-leading river stewardship.

Thank you for your commitment to accelerating solutions for climate resilience so that our future generations can live in a world of healthy and resilient rivers.



Jodie Bignall
CEO, International River Foundation (IRF)



Michael Wright
Chair, International River Foundation (IRF)

IRS 2025 snapshot

547M

Media reach



22 countries
across 5
continents
represented

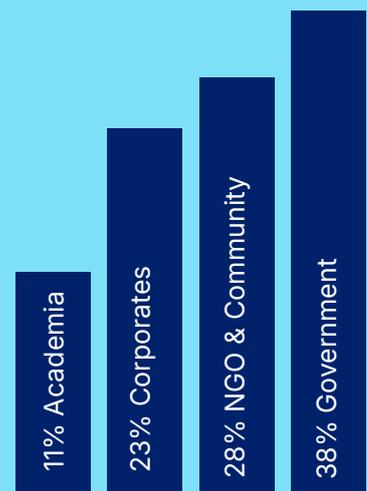
515

Delegates

- 70 Sessions
- 6 Masterclasses
- 12 Keynote speakers
- 4 Keynote panels
- 7 River Labs
- 25 River Dialogues
- 17 River X

4/5

Delegates would
attend future
Symposiums



45+

Hours of engaging
and informative
sessions

70

Thought leadership
sessions across

3

Days

104

Speakers

The world's pre-eminent river conference returned to Brisbane

Returning to its roots, IRS 2025 aligned with Brisbane Festival, a city-wide celebration of the river.



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 was held in partnership with Brisbane Festival, Brisbane's biggest cultural event. We were proud to align with this iconic event and amplify the world's focus on our river, welcoming over 500 delegates to the river city of Brisbane.



Photo credits: Brisbane Festival

26 years of inspiring action for river resilience

Since it was first held in 1998, the International River Symposium has evolved into an internationally renowned event, uniting global champions and changemakers to drive positive action for our rivers.



1998
Brisbane
Healthy Rivers



1999
Brisbane
Celebrating Rivers



2000
Brisbane
Sustaining Rivers
- Defining the New International Agenda



2001
Brisbane
River Business -
Turning Community Vision into Reality



2002
Brisbane
The Scarcity of Water -
The Future of Rivers,
the Future of Water



2003
Brisbane
Urban Rivers -
Balancing Expectations



2004
Brisbane
Threats to Sustainable
River Systems -
Beating the Odds



2005
Brisbane
Water and Food
Security - Rivers in a
Global Context



2006
Brisbane
Managing Rivers with
Climate Change and
Expanding Populations



2007
Brisbane
10th IRS and
Environmental Flows
Conference



2008
Brisbane
A Future of
Extremes



2009
Brisbane
Rivers from
Source to Sea



2010
Perth
Moving Water - The
Changing State of
Rivers



2011
Brisbane
The Value of
Rivers



2012
Melbourne
Rivers in a Rapidly
Urbanising World



2013
Brisbane
Rivers: Linking Water,
Energy and Food



2014
Canberra
Large River
Basins



2015
Brisbane
Healthy Rivers -
Healthy Economies



2016
New Delhi
Great Rivers of the
World: Management for
Shared Benefits



2017
Brisbane
Environmental Flows



2018
Sydney
Embracing Innovation



2019
Brisbane
Resilient Rivers



2020
Brisbane
Valuing our Rivers
VIRTUAL



2021
Brisbane
Recovery to Resilience:
Leveraging partnerships
HYBRID



2022
Vienna
Journey to Resilience:
Communities, Climate
and Biodiversity
HYBRID

A transformed International River Symposium

From hands on Masterclasses to engaging River Labs and short, sharp River X presentations, we transformed this year's Symposium program to inspire greater impact, actions, and tangible outcomes.



Masterclasses

This year, we introduced a full day of capacity-building masterclasses, offering delegates hands-on learning with industry experts. Across six, three-hour sessions, participants explored river governance, systems thinking, ecosystem report cards, climate-resilient cities and innovation in river restoration. The interactive format fostered peer exchange, empowering real-world impact and strengthening networks across sectors and regions.

River Labs

Delegates were invited to partake in one-hour thought leadership workshops designed to spark critical thinking and actionable solutions for river-related challenges. Building on insights from the Symposium Satellite Event series, these interactive sessions encouraged idea sharing, collaborative problem-solving, and innovation, empowering participants to translate discussions into practical strategies for healthier, more resilient rivers.



River Dialogues

These thirty-minute sessions examined successful river management initiatives in the context of climate change. In-depth case studies highlighted best practices, lessons learned, and innovative approaches, sparking collaboration and inspiring participants to apply proven strategies in their own river systems for more resilient and sustainable outcomes.

River X

Designed to spark insightful conversations, these fast-paced, ten-minute presentations showcased the latest concepts in river management. These sessions challenged conventional thinking, encouraged bold ideas, and inspired participants to explore innovative approaches, fostering dialogue and collaboration to drive transformative change in river and water systems.

Symposium satellite event series

In the lead-up to IRS 2025, the IRF hosted a series of online Symposium satellite events, focusing on the challenges and opportunities that our global river partners and industries face amid climate change.

Proudly sponsored by



Dedicated to a better Brisbane



Olympic Rivers: Restoring Urban Waterways and Creating a Legacy for Future Generations

28 November 2024

Key Messages

1. We need the courage to build community including First Nations people.
2. A whole-of-system understanding and management is critical for river cities like Brisbane.
3. Through revitalising our rivers, we ensure a legacy for future generations.
4. Urban Rivers do not need to be Olympic rivers to envision a future where they are swimmable and thrive as vibrant tourism hubs.
5. It is important to consider nature-based solutions for rivers.
6. Olympic and Paralympic Games can bring a range of opportunities to a city and its rivers.
7. Effective governance, dedicated investments, partnerships and community support cannot be underestimated.



Reviving Rivers: Fast-Tracking Solutions for Climate Resilience

20 March 2025

Key Messages

1. Restore and protect our rivers to address the global biodiversity crisis.
2. Frame river restoration within the context of economic incentives.
3. Step up to the climate challenge by prioritising river restoration.
4. Recognise that rivers touch on every aspect of communities.
5. River Restoration Networks - empowering communities to achieve a future where nature and communities coexist.
6. Civic organisations - investing in social capital for healthy rivers.
7. Underpin restoration efforts with adaptive management, rigorous science, effective monitoring and communication frameworks.
8. Engage with influential stakeholders across diverse motivations.



Plastic Rivers: Showcasing Solutions to Emerging Threats from Source to Sea

29 May 2025

Key Messages

1. We need local solutions rooted in community to address this global problem. Tackling plastic pollution requires deep engagement with local communities, rediscovering our connection to nature, and building trust-based, skill-sharing systems.
2. We must collaborate across the value chain to tackle plastics, microplastics, and PFAS at the source. Governments, industry, scientists, multi-stakeholder alliances and local communities must work together and develop scalable, local solutions that prevent plastic pollution at the source.
3. It is critical for us to move beyond recycling – reconnect with nature and phase out harmful materials. We need to choose safer materials, educate communities, and end the age of single-use plastics.

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
International River Foundation



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 Palanisami
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

Partnering for river resilience

Demonstrating a commitment to working alongside international partners for our rivers, the International River Foundation signed MoUs with the Asian River Restoration Network and European Centre for River Restoration.



Extending the IRF's global river leadership role and anchoring partnerships across Asia, we welcomed fifteen representatives from the Asian River Restoration Network (ARRN) representing China, Japan and South Korea to sign an MoU for ongoing collaborative action.

The ARRN is a non-political network promoting knowledge exchange on river and watershed restoration in Asia. It connects organisations and individuals, fostering collaboration and advancing scientific technology to enhance river environments.



Michael Wright, International River Foundation Chair, and Wenqi Peng, Asian River Restoration Network Chair, signing an MoU between the two organisations.

We were also joined by two representatives from the European Centre for River Restoration (ECRR), to sign an MoU that lays the groundwork for future regional River Prizes and other collaborative initiatives.

The ECRR aims to encourage and support ecological river restoration, connect people and organisations, support best practice river restoration, and disseminate knowledge.

Through these MoUs, we aim to advance the protection and sustainable management of river ecosystems, promote capacity building initiatives, and facilitate knowledge exchange to ensure the resilience of rivers in these regions.



Michael Wright, International River Foundation Chair, and Bart Fokkens, European Centre for River Restoration (ECRR) Chair, shaking hands after signing an MoU between the two organisations.

Inspiring the next generation of river leaders

Proudly sponsored by



Program Delivery Partner



Proudly hosted by



Proudly supported by the Queensland Government Engaging Science Grants



Judging Panel



Lynn Hong
Coca Cola



José Antonio Fernández López-Lavalle
WetWize



Emma Eslick
South Bank Corporation



Keith Alexander
Queensland University of Technology

Kicking off IRS 2025, we challenged the next generation of river leaders to pitch bold, innovative solutions for the Brisbane River ahead of the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

25 high school students across 8 teams joined the Riverpreneurs Riverpitch Challenge, utilising Minecraft to design a state-of-the-art River Institute and Tourism Centre on the Brisbane River.

Following an inspirational keynote from Jose Fernandez, in just 45 minutes, students explored human- and Country-centred design, green infrastructure, and nature-based solutions to protect and restore our rivers, all while considering the United Nations SDGs.

This year's Riverpreneurs Riverpitch Challenge winners reimagined Brisbane's iconic CityCats not just as a mode of transport, but as floating information centres that collect plastic waste along their journey.



Welcoming delegates to the river city of Brisbane



Proudly sponsored by



Dedicated to a better Brisbane



Council of Mayors
South East Queensland

Proudly hosted by



The Welcome Reception united changemakers across borders and sectors to connect and exchange insights on the future of our rivers.

Setting a compelling tone for IRS 2025, this networking event reinforced Brisbane's position as a global hub for river innovation and sustainable development.

Emceed by IRF Board Director Sarah Zeljko, we were joined by local, national and international river leaders including Hon. Anne Leahy MP, Queensland Local Government and Water and Minister for Fire, Disaster Recovery and Volunteers, who addressed the importance of integrated catchment management and community engagement. Hon. Andrew Powell MP, Queensland Minister for the Environment and Tourism and Minister for Science and Innovation, addressed the role of infrastructure in supporting

sustainable waterway restoration.

The Lord Mayor of Brisbane, Adrian Schrinner, reflected on the city's leadership in urban waterway innovation and its role as Australia's river city. Mayors from the Council of Mayors SEQ also joined forces to showcase our beautiful region and the collective impact of Resilient Rivers SEQ during an engaging video address.

Anne Sherry AO, Chancellor of the Queensland University of Technology, and Peter Varghese AO, Chancellor of The University of Queensland, offered perspectives on the intersection of education, research, and policy in driving sustainable environmental outcomes.

Michael Wright, IRF Chair and Executive Chair and CEO of Thies, closed the formal proceedings with a call to action for the industry to charge forward with environmental stewardship, and announced the appointment of Hon. Andrew Powell MP as the newest Director of the IRF Board.



Capacity-building masterclasses

Climate-Resilient Cities Design Challenge (An Interactive Event)



Proudly sponsored by The University of Queensland



The masterclass delivered brief lectures on climate impacts, resilient infrastructure, water-sensitive urban design and integrated planning, followed by a fast-paced scenario-driven Design Challenge. Multidisciplinary teams collaborated to address complex urban problems through learning-by-doing, creating approaches for resilient, liveable, water-sensitive and energy-efficient cities.

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



Proudly hosted by Resilient Rivers SEQ, an initiative of Council of Mayors SEQ



Participants examined how strong governance across 11 councils enables coordinated on-ground action. They were invited to apply a whole-of-system, values-based approach to balance diverse stakeholder needs, and discussed the enablers and challenges of implementing interventions. The session highlighted how partnerships can drive lasting, sustainable impact in catchment management.

Reimagining River Governance: Collaborative Systems Approaches to Integrated Catchment Management



Proudly hosted by Systems Collaboration Partners



This experiential masterclass equipped river leaders, policymakers and practitioners with systems perspectives and collaboration tools to shift from fragmented efforts to coordinated, systems-level action. Participants explored systems-thinking frameworks, collaborative processes, catchment-level governance approaches and the power of re-framing deep stories in complex systems.

Capacity-building masterclasses

Evolved. 25 Years of Water Wisdom: The Report Card That Started Them All in Constant Innovation AI, Storytelling – Supercharging the Next 25 Years



Proudly hosted by Healthy Land & Water



The masterclass traced the 25-year journey of the SEQ Report Card, combining an opening showcase of milestones with a panel on “Science, Society and Storytelling”. Discussions demonstrated the role of long-term monitoring, co-design, Indigenous knowledge, citizen science and the transformative potential of AI in advancing sustainability and resilience. The session culminated in an interactive lab, where participants envisioned the future of waterway health reporting by 2050.

Flood Resilience Futures



Proudly sponsored by Flood Community of Practice



The masterclass examined innovative approaches to building resilient, healthy catchments and communities in response to increasing flood risks. Through case studies from Indonesia, Fiji and Nepal, the session demonstrated how this citizen-centric, collaborative framework helps communities develop shared visions for reducing flood risk and fostering long-term adaptation and resilience.

Ecological Healthy Rivers Support Sustainable Social Development



Proudly hosted by the Asian River Restoration Network



This technical workshop explored the impacts of climate change and human activities on river ecosystems, highlighting the urgent need for resilient river restoration strategies to support sustainable development. Experts from across Asia shared cutting-edge concepts, technologies, and management practices, fostering rich dialogue and collaboration.

River Lab learnings



Rivers for Generations: Lessons from the Murray-Darling Basin Plan

Proudly sponsored by the Murray-Darling Basin Authority



This session examined Australia's Murray–Darling Basin management, reflecting on 13 years of the Basin Plan Implementation. Insights from the 2025 evaluation highlighted achievements, challenges, and future innovations in governance and water sharing to sustain healthy rivers, resilient communities, and industries in response to a changing climate.



A River City: Building Flood Resilience in a Growing City

Proudly sponsored by Brisbane City Council



Dedicated to a better Brisbane

This session explored how Brisbane City Council is transforming Brisbane into a sustainable, flood-resilient river city amid rapid growth. Speakers highlighted key resilience initiatives, sustainable design choices, and industry collaboration needed to balance development with long-term environmental and economic sustainability ahead of the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games.



From Lab to Rivers: Tackling Present and Emerging Contaminants through Innovation and Collective Efforts

This session examined how to bridge the gap between scientific discovery and large-scale action to tackle contaminants in waterways. Researchers, innovators, and industry leaders shared real-world examples of scalable technologies and collaborations, highlighting how collective innovation can protect river health, ecosystems, and communities for future generations.



What it Takes to Lead: Reimagining River Leadership

This session explored what it really takes to lead transformative change in river and water systems — not just from formal leadership roles, but from any position. Participants were invited to reflect on their own leadership potential, the small but powerful actions that ripple outwards, and the bold ideas that challenge business-as-usual thinking.

River Lab learnings



Swimmable Rivers: Olympic Rivers

This session spotlighted the global swimmable cities movement, exploring how innovative design, governance, and community collaboration can transform urban waterways into safe, accessible, and inviting public spaces. It examined how Brisbane could embrace swimmable waterways to enhance health, wellbeing, and connection to blue spaces. As Brisbane prepares to host the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games, the discussion inspired new ideas and possibilities for strengthening the city's identity as a vibrant, river-connected, and active lifestyle destination.



River Restoration: Restore our Rivers Faster and Better

This session brought together River Restoration Centres from Australia, Europe, and Asia to explore how global collaboration accelerates and enhances river restoration.

Through shared experiences, stories, and practical insights, participants built connections, exchanged knowledge, and inspired collective action to restore and protect rivers worldwide. The discussion also highlighted strategies for fostering community engagement and empowering others to contribute to healthier, more resilient rivers.



Innovative Finance: Nature Based Solutions and Environmental Markets for River Resilience

This session explored how the Asian Development Bank's (ADB) nature-based solutions harness ecological processes to enhance river basin management, biodiversity, and climate resilience.

Through flagship programs in the Yangtze and Yellow River Basins, ADB is scaling investments in natural capital and innovative finance to drive sustainable food systems, regenerative agriculture, and resilient development across Asia-Pacific.

Insights from our keynote speakers



Dr Stuart Orr
Director, International River Foundation

Rivers play a vital role in our economies and lives - in climate adaptation, food security and economic prosperity. The restoration of river systems is now gaining momentum as it becomes clearer every day that climate change will be felt by humanity mainly through water, placing rivers at the centre of efforts around adaptation, resilience and future proofing our societies. We need to tell the story of valuing rivers.



Dr Qingfeng Zhang
Senior Director, Agriculture, Food, Nature, and Rural Development Sector Office, Asian Development Bank

Rivers are not just water - they are food systems, carbon sinks, biodiversity corridors, and lifelines for billions. Yet across Asia and the Pacific, where half the world's population lives, river basins are under mounting stress from climate change, land degradation, and food price volatility. River health is critical to food security. A Blue Deal is urgent: healthy rivers for resilient food, resilient people, and resilient futures.



Dr Siwan Lovett
CEO and Founder, Australian River Restoration Centre

Rivers need a voice. We need advocacy that focuses on solutions rather than blame, fosters collaboration instead of competition, and promotes dialogues over disputes. Hope is essential for resilience. If we work with others and with nature, we can do so much more.



Dr James Fitzsimons
Senior Advisor, Global Protection Strategies, The Nature Conservancy

Increasing our investment into the restoration and conservation of freshwater ecosystems to ensure the protection of their biodiversity and ecosystem services is critical. Over 50 countries including Australia have signed up to the Freshwater Challenge, a voluntary, country-led initiative that aims to integrate and accelerate the restoration of 300,000 km of degraded rivers and 350 million hectares of degraded wetlands by 2030.

Keynote plenary panel takeaways



Indigenous Knowledge Guiding the Journey to River Resilience

(A tribute to Leith Bouilly)

“River Basin Bookends” speaks to the interconnectedness of all parts of a river system — geographically, ecologically, and culturally — held together by the voices, knowledge, and stewardship of communities at both ends and all along the river’s path.

The drive for Indigenous Peoples to take care of Country is a human right. It is important to embed Indigenous people and not just their knowledge. Key principles for Indigenous engagement include mutual trust and respect, valuing different knowledge

systems, engaging in good faith with genuine intentions, ongoing involvement in co-design and co-delivery beyond consultation and collective decision making. There are incredible outcomes when Indigenous people are empowered to work on projects.

Michelle Hobbs
Griffith University

Erina Watene
Kaitaki, Waikato and Waipa Awa



Stories from the Past, Dreams for the Future

This session invited audiences to consider our rivers through the lens of storytelling, exploring Simon Cleary’s intimate journey walking from start to end of the Brisbane River, and Dr Margaret Cook’s exploration of the compelling history of floods in the Brisbane River Catchment.

Storytelling has the power to connect people. We need to be attentive to rivers – their preciousness and the connection between place and rivers. The more we are all able to see rivers as precious – sustaining life and in other ways – the more likelihood that sustainability projects will happen.

History is a great teacher; there have been rich histories of floods in the past. We can take those lessons to do better next time. The recurring and devastating floods are not only a river problem, but a city problem. Talk to people, connect with local communities, so we can take that knowledge as we move into the future.

Dr Margaret Cook
Author, *A River With A City Problem*

Simon Cleary
Author, *Everything Is Water*

Facilitator: John Taylor
ABC Radio Brisbane

Rivers as gateways: fostering trade, tourism and community wellbeing



Moderator:

Sarah Zeljko, Board Director, International River Foundation

Presenters:

DG Patricia O'Callaghan, Director-General, Department of the Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation

Neil Stephens, CEO, Port of Brisbane

John Sharpe, Founder, Riverlife

Will Harpham, Executive General Manager, Customer, Strategy, Governance, Seqwater

Steve Richards, Managing Director of Australia & New Zealand, AmaWaterways

Rivers have long served as lifelines of commerce, culture, and connection. Today, they are not only vital corridors for trade and transport but also vibrant spaces for recreation, tourism, and community life.

The keynote panel explored how rivers can be managed as gateways that balance economic opportunity with cultural identity, ecological health, and social wellbeing. It showcased how thriving river fronts can attract investment, create jobs, support cultural expression, and enhance community resilience.

It is critical to consider the challenges of navigating competing demands on rivers — from shipping and development to recreation and conservation — and the importance of inclusive governance that ensures rivers serve both present and future generations. We need to reimagine rivers not only as economic gateways but as shared spaces that foster prosperity, wellbeing, and connection for all.

Insights from our global river champions



Moderators:

Philip Weller, Board Director, International River Foundation

Dr Deborah Nias, CEO, Murray Darling Wetlands Working Group

Presenters:

Olsi Nika, Executive Director, EcoAlbania

John Quail, Director of Policy and Conservation, Friends of the Chicago River

George Heritage, Director, Dynamic Rivers

Tim DeGraff, Vice President, Western United States, Resource Environmental Solutions

Dr Nick Edgar, Chief Executive Officer

NZ Landcare Trust/Ngā Matapopore Whenua

Brian Mast, Deputy Director, Government Affairs
San Antonio River Authority

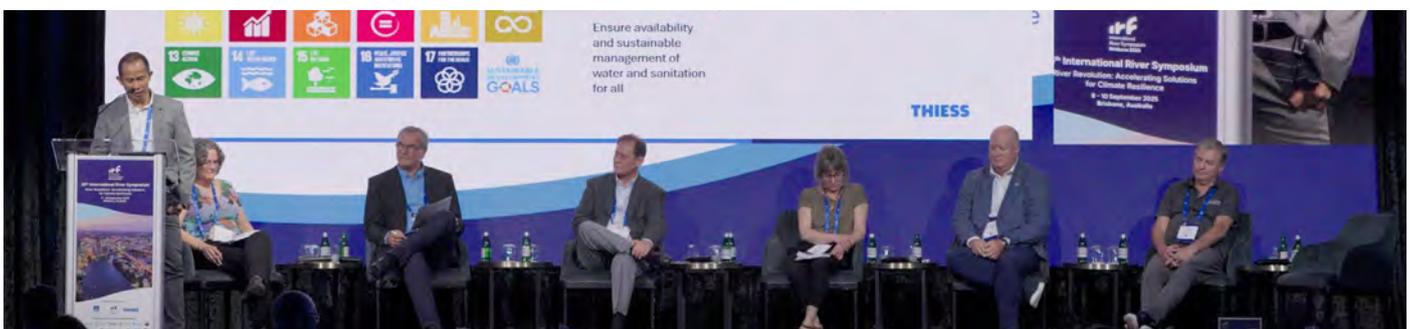
Yohanes Agustian, Environmental Superintendent,
Thiess

Robert Baldwin, Chief Administrative Officer
Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority

Ursula Taylor, Chief Executive Officer
Derwent Estuary Program



The Global River Champions Keynote Panel demonstrated how river rehabilitation and management requires a long-term vision backed up with sound strategic plans and activities. Efforts to restore rivers can take decades, requiring commitment from many institutions and community. The themes of resilience, persistence and patience were consistent across all the keynote panel members, along with the need to think creatively when engaging with community and to put people at the heart of all restoration activities. The role of First Nations people in restoring rivers was also highlighted, recognising the importance of water, rivers and wetlands to First Nations people who maintain strong spiritual, economic and cultural practices across the world.



Celebrating our global river champions

Since 1999, the Thies International River Prize has celebrated excellence in the sustainable management, protection and restoration of rivers.



Chicago River, USA | Winner

Friends of the Chicago River is the only organisation dedicated to transforming the 251-kilometre Chicago-Calumet River system into a healthy, biodiverse and climate-resilient ecosystem. Since 1979, it has led restoration efforts, driving lasting change for both people and wildlife.



Cumbria Rivers, UK | Finalist

Now in its fifteenth year, the Cumbria River Restoration Strategy unites diverse partners to revive natural river processes, boost biodiversity, reduce flood risk and build climate resilience. Through this programme, hundreds of kilometres of rivers and floodplains have been restored.



Klamath River, USA | Finalist

The Lower Klamath Project, led by the Klamath River Renewal Corporation, is the largest dam removal and river restoration effort in U.S. history. By removing four hydroelectric dams, it reconnects over 640 kilometres of river habitat, restores salmon migration, and supports Tribal Nations' cultural and subsistence practices.



Vjosa River, Albania | Finalist

As Europe's last wild river, the Vjosa River flows freely for 270 kilometres from Greece to Albania. Once threatened by large-scale hydropower projects, the "Save the Blue Heart of Europe" campaign successfully halted dam developments through science, legal action, and community mobilisation.

A night of collaboration and celebration

Proudly sponsored by



Dedicated to a better Brisbane

THIESS



IRS 2025 culminated in a night of celebration for our rivers and the global changemakers working to ensure their resilience.

On the final night of this year's Symposium, we welcomed over 400 delegates to the Gala Dinner and Thies International River Prize Awards.



Emceed by Brisbane-based media personality, Rebecca Lvingston, the formalities commenced with the Acknowledgement of Country performed by South Sea and Yuwi Burra descendant, Waveney Yasso. The Lord Mayor of Brisbane and IRF Board Director, Adrian Schrinner, welcomed delegates to the night of celebration, before Mina Guli inspired audiences with a bold call to collective action for our rivers and waterways.

We were also joined by Vice-Chancellor of The University of Queensland Prof Deborah Terry AC, and we recognised the exceptional impact achieved through the Tweed Kenya Mentoring Program, a 20-year project run by the Tweed Shire Council with the support of the IRF, that has transformed countless lives in Western Kenya through increasing access to safe water and sanitation.



The night concluded with the awarding of the 2025 Thies International River Prize to the Chicago River, recognising Friends of the Chicago River's outstanding work restoring the watershed for people, water and wildlife. Special thanks to this year's judging panel: Prof Bill Dennison, Bart Fokkens, Brian Kemp, Dr Deborah Nias, Lauren Gartlan, Marcella D'Souza and Prof Paul Greenfield AO.

Who attended?

515
Delegates



28%
NGO and
Nonprofit



104
Speakers



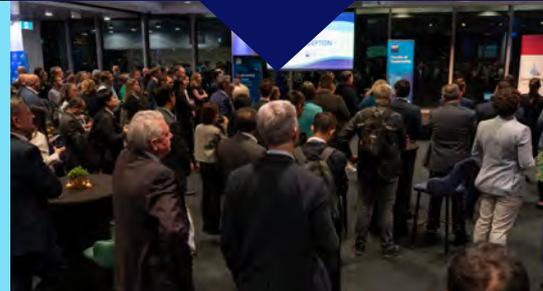
11%
Academia and
Research



38%
Government

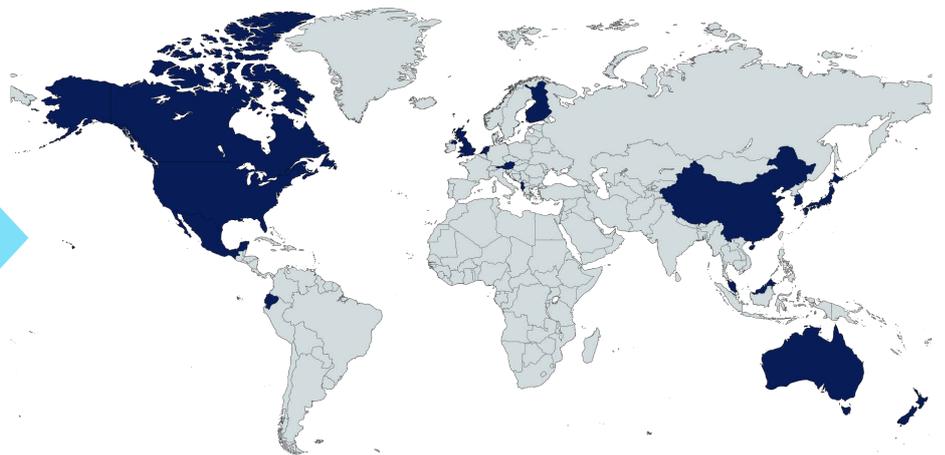


23%
Corporate



22
Countries
represented
across

5
Continents



A global river network

The International River Foundation is supported by a global network of changemakers, who are committed to working alongside us to accelerate the world's transition to healthy and resilient rivers for future generations.



IRF Board of Directors

The IRF is guided by a Board of passionate and dedicated individuals, committed to the health and resilience of our world's rivers. At IRS 2025, IRF Chair Michael Wright announced the appointment of our newest Director, The Honourable Andrew Powell MP, Queensland State Minister for the Environment and Tourism and Minister for Science and Innovation.



River Patrons

Our River Patrons are a passionate group of respected leaders united by a shared vision: to restore and protect the lifeblood of our planet for generations to come. We welcomed Tweed Shire Council's Mayor Chris Cherry during the Symposium, joining a growing group including Peter Varghese AO, Lord Mayor Adrian Schinnerer, Michael Wright, Dr Jane Wilson AO, Neil Stephens and Steve Richards.



River Leaders Network

Since the awarding of the first Thies International River Prize (TIRP) in 1999, our River Leaders Network has grown to comprise River Prize winners and finalists as well as scholarship and fellowship recipients. During IRS 2025 we welcomed the Klamath River to our River Prize Alumni, joining 2025 winner and 2019 and 2021 finalist, the Chicago River, 2022 European River Prize winner and 2025 TIRP finalist, the Cumbria Rivers, and 2022 European River Prize finalist and 2025 TIRP finalist, the Vjosa River.

We were honoured to welcome fellow River Prize Alumni to the stage during our Global River Leaders keynote panel, with representatives from the Murray Wetlands (Australia), Danube River (Europe), San Antonio River (USA), Lake Simcoe (Canada), Aorere River (New Zealand) and Derwent Estuary (Australia).

Emerging Water Professional award recipient Jose Fernandez also joined our panel of judges during the Riverpreneurs Riverpitch Challenge.

Our global outreach

Social Media & Web



Website page views
19.2K



Email subscribers
8.8K



Facebook followers
10.4K



LinkedIn followers
2,773
32.4% GROWTH



Instagram followers
785



X (Twitter) followers
3.9K



Social media impressions
35K



Social media engagements
1K

Media Coverage

Mentions by Country



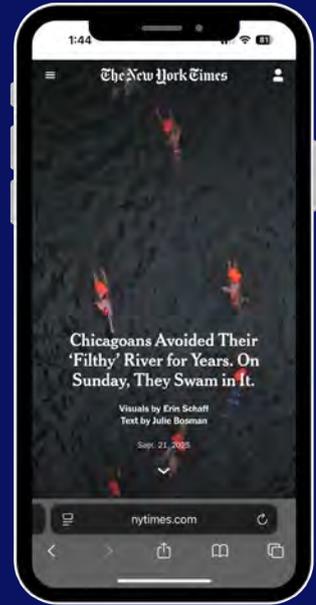
- 86** Australia
- 36** United Kingdom
- 14** United States
- 12** South Korea
- 5** Switzerland
- 36** United Arab Emirates
- 14** Germany
- 12** Indonesia
- 5** Uganda
- 5** Unknown Region



AVE Value of
7.83M



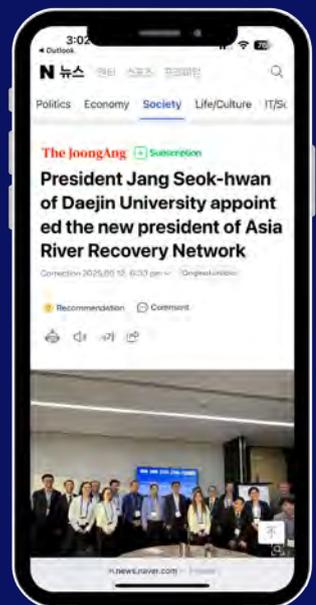
Total Mentions
162



133M Reach



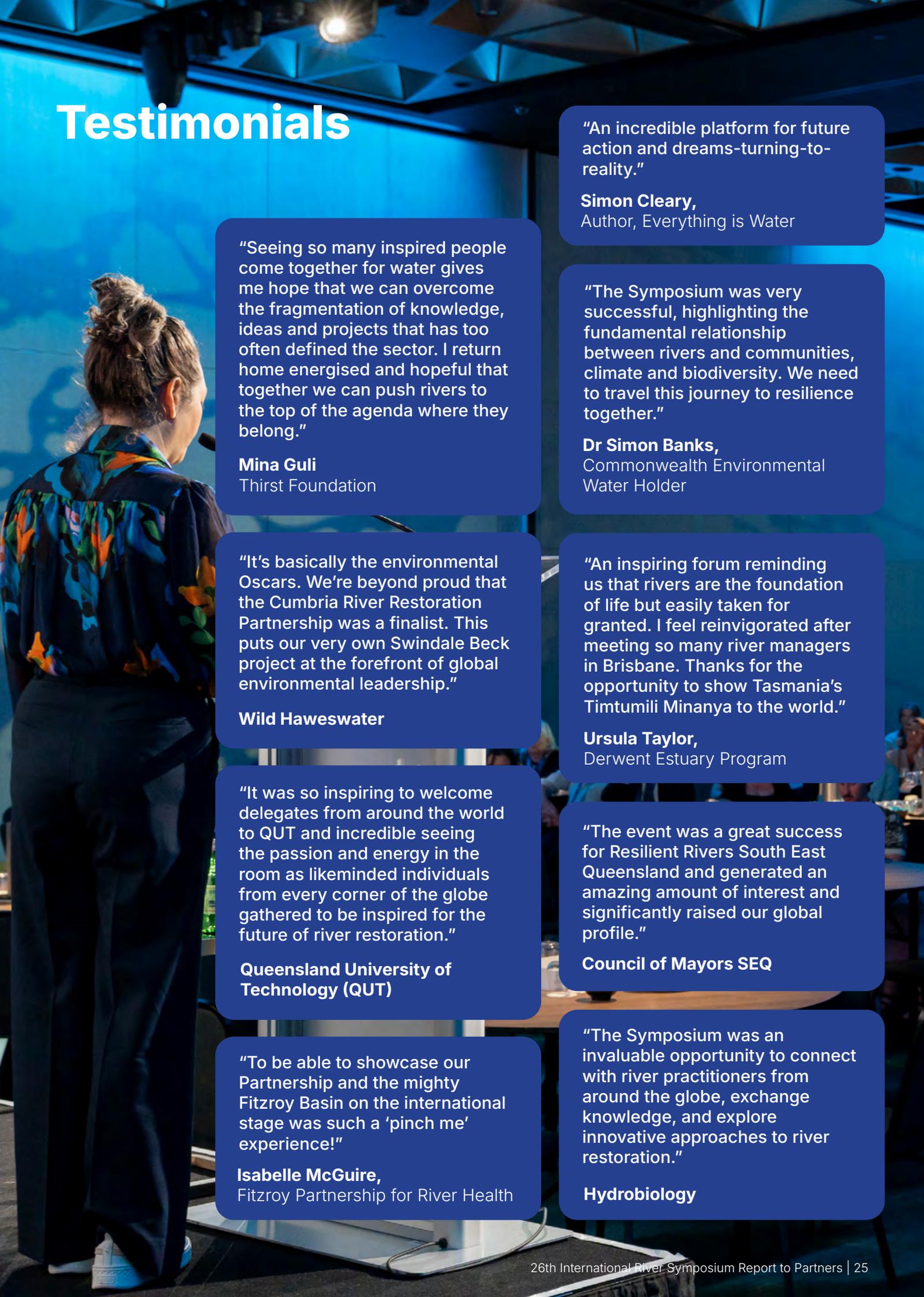
148M Reach



53.3M Reach

Notable Media Mentions

Testimonials



"Seeing so many inspired people come together for water gives me hope that we can overcome the fragmentation of knowledge, ideas and projects that has too often defined the sector. I return home energised and hopeful that together we can push rivers to the top of the agenda where they belong."

Mina Guli
Thirst Foundation

"It's basically the environmental Oscars. We're beyond proud that the Cumbria River Restoration Partnership was a finalist. This puts our very own Swindale Beck project at the forefront of global environmental leadership."

Wild Haweswater

"It was so inspiring to welcome delegates from around the world to QUT and incredible seeing the passion and energy in the room as likeminded individuals from every corner of the globe gathered to be inspired for the future of river restoration."

Queensland University of Technology (QUT)

"To be able to showcase our Partnership and the mighty Fitzroy Basin on the international stage was such a 'pinch me' experience!"

Isabelle McGuire,
Fitzroy Partnership for River Health

"An incredible platform for future action and dreams-turning-to-reality."

Simon Cleary,
Author, Everything is Water

"The Symposium was very successful, highlighting the fundamental relationship between rivers and communities, climate and biodiversity. We need to travel this journey to resilience together."

Dr Simon Banks,
Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder

"An inspiring forum reminding us that rivers are the foundation of life but easily taken for granted. I feel reinvigorated after meeting so many river managers in Brisbane. Thanks for the opportunity to show Tasmania's Tintumili Minanya to the world."

Ursula Taylor,
Derwent Estuary Program

"The event was a great success for Resilient Rivers South East Queensland and generated an amazing amount of interest and significantly raised our global profile."

Council of Mayors SEQ

"The Symposium was an invaluable opportunity to connect with river practitioners from around the globe, exchange knowledge, and explore innovative approaches to river restoration."

Hydrobiology

Making it happen

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Dr Stuart Orr

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Prof Paul Greenfield AO

VENUE HOSTS

The Star Brisbane
Queensland University of Technology (QUT)

VOLUNTEERS

Asaesja Young
Catherine Michael
Eva Wingrove
Jack Clements
Kate East
Nick Heath
Pamela Greet
Serena Herbert
Wade Charles

SPECIAL THANKS TO

Eric Milliken, Starlight Media
Stephen Henry Photography
Vegas Please
Craft Wines
Cuisine on Cue



River Revolution: Accelerating Solutions for Climate Resilience

irf
International
River Symposium
Brisbane 2025

8 - 10 September 2025 | Brisbane, Australia

Report to Partners

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