

26th International River Symposium Key Messages

RIVER REVOLUTION: ACCELERATING SOLUTIONS
FOR CLIMATE RESILIENCE

8 - 10 SEPTEMBER 2025 | BRISBANE, AUSTRALIA

The International River Foundation

As the world's leading voice for rivers, the International River Foundation (IRF) is a global environmental not-for-profit, established to unite changemakers to accelerate and scale river solutions across the world for future generations.

At the heart, is the simple equation: People and Partners + Ideas = Impact.

The 26th International River Symposium

In the face of an escalating climate crisis, the International River Symposium (IRS) 2025 theme, 'River Revolution: Accelerating Solutions for Climate Resilience', united diverse stakeholders to catalyse innovative practices and sustainable funding, driving transformative action for thriving ecosystems, communities and economies.

The River Revolution calls for urgent, coordinated action to restore and protect rivers as critical systems for climate resilience, food security, and sustainable development. Now is the time to turn commitments into measurable outcomes through science and innovation, inclusive governance, collective efforts and sustainable investments.

IRS 2025 Snapshot

Total delegates

515

Total speakers

104

Countries represented

22

Thought leadership sessions

70

Hours of content

45+

Social media impressions

35K

Media reach

547M

Advertising value equivalence

7.83M

26TH INTERNATIONAL RIVER SYMPOSIUM KEY MESSAGES



1. Rivers are essential systems, supporting people, nature, and economies.

Rivers sustain water security, food production, energy, biodiversity, and cultural wellbeing, serving as lifelines for healthy and liveable communities.

Action: Integrate river health as a measurable target within national climate, development, and economic policies.

2. Science, innovation and monitoring drive effective river management.

Evidence-based programs, such as Australia's Flow-MER and lessons from the Murray-Darling Basin, demonstrate how long-term monitoring, adaptive planning, and cross-jurisdictional cooperation improve outcomes for people and nature. Innovation through natural capital accounting and circular food systems strengthens decision-making.

Action: Invest in basin-wide monitoring, knowledge-sharing, and science-based tools to support transparent policy and investment decisions.

3. Collaboration across sectors and borders delivers effective solutions for our rivers.

Effective river management depends on partnerships among governments, Indigenous Peoples, scientists, communities, and the private sector. Transboundary cooperation—such as the International Joint Commission—demonstrates that trust, neutrality, and shared data reduce conflict and enhance outcomes.

Action: Strengthen basin-wide and international water cooperation frameworks that align policy, data, and community engagement.

4. Indigenous leadership must shape how rivers are managed.

Indigenous Peoples are custodians of river systems. Co-designing policies and programs with Indigenous leadership ensures legitimacy, continuity, and cultural integrity.

Action: Embed Indigenous leadership, co-design, and co-delivery in river and water initiatives, moving beyond consultation to shared decision-making and respect for cultural protocols.

5. Financing river restoration is an investment in resilience.

Rivers underpin economies and adaptation efforts. Investments in flood resilience projects in river cities demonstrate how integrating river restoration with urban planning reduces risk, revitalises communities, and supports long-term economic recovery. Despite rivers being central to climate adaptation, economic growth, and food security, they remain underfunded.

Action: Mobilise public-private finance, corporate responsibility programs, and innovative mechanisms to scale up river restoration.

6. Healthy rivers are central to climate adaptation and food security.

Rivers connect ecosystems, agriculture, and livelihoods. Addressing existing and emerging pollutants — from agricultural runoff to microplastics — is vital to maintaining water quality and ecosystem health. Wetland restoration, catchment management, and headwater protection reduces flood and drought risks.

Action: Prioritise nature-based solutions and regional initiatives such as a "Blue Deal" for Asia-Pacific to link river health, food systems, and resilience.

7. Community and collective action are key to implementation.

Local ownership and volunteer grassroots movements such as Rotary's Community Action for Freshwater accelerate on-the-ground results.

Action: Support and resource community-based initiatives that contribute to national and global river restoration goals.

8. Global cooperation turns commitments into measurable outcomes.

Initiatives such as the Freshwater Challenge unite over 50 countries to restore 300,000 km of rivers and 350 million ha of wetlands by 2030.

Action: Align national river programs with global restoration targets and share lessons learned and results transparently.

9. Leadership, advocacy, and shared responsibility accelerate change.

Rivers need courageous leadership, collective advocacy focused on solutions, inclusive engagement, and long-term stewardship. Progress depends on cross-sector partnerships, public engagement, and the courage to act.

Action: Empower leaders and youth to turn commitment into measurable results and build a culture of stewardship grounded in evidence, inclusion, and hope.

10. Join the River Revolution — act now to restore and protect the rivers that sustain our climate, our food, and our future.

The River Revolution is about shifting from talk to action - uniting governments, communities, and industries to restore and protect the rivers that sustain life and shape our future. It calls for innovation, bold leadership, and investment that bridges human needs and policy decisions.

Action: Act now to accelerate a global River Revolution - a collective effort to restore and protect the world's rivers - through innovation, inclusive leadership and investment.

26TH INTERNATIONAL RIVER SYMPOSIUM KEYNOTE SPEAKERS AND PANELISTS



Dr Simon Banks
Commonwealth Environmental
Water Holder



Erina Watene
Kaitaki, Waikato and Waipa Awa



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



Dr Pierre Baril
Canadian Commissioner
and Chair, International Joint
Commission



Simon Cleary
Author, Everything Is Water



George Heritage
Director, Dynamic Rivers



Mina Guli
CEO, Thirst Foundation



Dr Margaret Cook
Author, A City With A River
Problem



Tim DeGraff
Vice President, Western United
States, Resource Environmental
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Salvador Rico
Founder, Cleaning the Rivers
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Advisor, Community Action for
Freshwater



DG Patricia O'Callaghan
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Dr Nick Edgar
Chief Executive Officer
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Brian Mast
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