

OARSOME



DOMINIQUE HARALDSON GIVES A SHOUT OUT TO THE MASSIVE MURRAY PADDLE AND HOW IT CONNECTS PEOPLE, RIVER AND COUNTRY.



In late November 2016, an energised team of Murray–Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) staff joined almost 350 paddlers on the Murray River to kayak from Yarrowonga to Swan Hill over five days. It was a great opportunity to be on the river and talk with people equally passionate about water and healthy rivers.

The Massive Murray Paddle totals some 404 kilometres. The first paddlers to make this epic journey were a group of nine people in 1969 raising money for the Red Cross. Since then, the event has raised an estimated \$3–4 million for the Red Cross and the YMCA. The MDBA chose to fund raise for the Cerebral Palsy Alliance, and were delighted to raise \$7300 for this worthy cause. Overall the event raised \$100,000 for local community programs.

The paddle is not for the faint-hearted. The week included sweltering hot weather, rain and wind storms, multiple blisters and sore muscles, but all that is forgotten when you get to see everyone having a go, explore parts of the river you haven't seen before and connect with local communities.

The Massive Murray Paddle brings together all sorts of competitors. From those who have competed for more than 30 years, to fresh-faced newbies who really didn't know what they were in for—in our case most of the MDBA team! There were also many different paddling crafts—event goers can paddle on kayaks, canoes, outriggers and other home-made boats.

As the race was on the back of natural flooding, it was really amazing to see how the river changes in years of flood. Many reaches had freshly-deposited sand bars, ideal for landing a boat, and in many places the river remained high enough to allow paddlers to see over the banks into the flourishing floodplains beyond. It was also great to see the river channels first-hand, and to get a better understanding of how and why the river changes throughout this reach.

Conversations we had while on the river included comparing notes on the best paddle technique, the best snacks, and how we all came to be in the race. Once we started talking about the MDBA's work, many paddlers agreed something had to be done to help the river—but not everyone agreed on how this should be done, highlighting how complex the issue of water management is.

The Massive Murray Paddle was a fantastic experience, which a team from the MDBA hope to take part in again in 2017.

Above: Early morning mists were a feature of the Massive Murray Paddle. Photo courtesy MDBA.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

<https://www.massivemurraypaddle.org.au/>