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MEDIA RELEASE

Historic Stone Walls to be Studied by Mid Murray Council as Future Tourism Asset

Long and winding dry stone walls have been a part of the Mid Murray regional landscape for more than one hundred and sixty years and Mid Murray Council is contemplating an expert study to ensure the historical structures are preserved for future generations.

Painstakingly built stone-by-stone by skilled tradesmen for stock fencing and shelter during the mid-1800s, an estimated 52 kilometres of the walls stretch across properties and land within Mid Murray Council boundaries.

Before the walls succumb to age, weather conditions and clearing by landholders, Council is considering allocating funds in the 2019/20 budget towards a survey and audit to assist in preserving the structures.

Meanwhile, Council is currently seeking heritage listing for two of the walls in Keyneton and Rocky Point as part of the Southern Heritage Places Development Plan Amendments.

Mid Murray Council Acting Director of Development and Environmental Services Joel Taggart says the walls hold significant historical value and an award-winning study by a Victorian Council may serve as inspiration for Mid Murray's future plans.

"These dry stone walls are such a unique feature and a significant part of the district's history and there is tremendous potential towards future tourism prospects," he says.

"In terms of assessing and utilising the walls for community and tourism use, the City of Melton in Victoria has really paved the way.

"The Melton Dry Stone Wall Study both documented, assessed and mapped all the dry stone walls in the city, recommended planning controls for walls that should be protected and also produced a driving trail for people to visit the structures."

Using a similar model, Mr Taggart said Council would seek expert advice from historians, heritage architectural consultants and the Dry Stone Wall Association of Australia to research the history and significance of the walls and conduct an aerial photographic survey to map and reveal the general conditions of the walls.

Armed with photographs and information, Mr Taggart says a final report would help inform Council which structures were in the best condition to then potentially seek heritage listing for additional walls.

"Council wants Mid Murray's dry stone walls to be around for many more generations and it's important that we act to preserve these structures before they're gone," he says.

"At the end of the study, it would also be great to have a publicly available document that would show Council, landholders and the general public where the best examples are and potentially open up a niche tourism market for the region," he says.

Former Mid Murray resident and DSWAA South Australian committee member Bruce Munday says he is delighted Mid Murray Council is taking the first steps towards assessing and protecting the walls.

"They really are an important historical relic and from a tourism perspective, there is very strong interest and plenty of potential for towns to capitalise on them," he says.

“It’s only now that people are beginning to put a value on them - they will never be built today.” Mr Munday says the dual purpose structures were “built to last” and were incredibly time-consuming and labour intensive to build.

“Generally speaking, it took three months for four people to build a mile of fence,” he says.

“They really are a reminder of the tremendous effort that went into opening that land by early pastoralists.”

Although animals often caused damage to the walls, Mr Munday believes the biggest risk to the structures was “human intervention” or lack thereof.

“One of the most serious threats is people carting off a trailer load of stone to line their fishpond or garden and I’ve seen them do it,” he says.

“With no protection or action, it is inevitable the structures will eventually fall down.”

Mid Murray Mayor Dave Burgess says the ruins are just as important as complete structures and Council was acting now to help preserve the structures.

“These are valuable historical artifacts with tremendous tourism potential,” he says.

“It’s a firm priority of Councils to move on this study, and with the help of experts, protect and preserve a part of our history.”

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