



## River Murray Dark Sky Reserve – Fact Sheet

- **What is the concept?**

Put simply, Dark Sky accreditation is like World Heritage Listing for the night sky.

The idea is to create a Dark Sky Reserve in the Mid-Murray region.

- **Why the concept?**

As cities grow, so does the spread of light pollution. Recent research shows that more than 80% of the world population and more than 99% of U.S. and European residents live under light-polluted skies. In many cities around the world it is impossible to see the stars, and some even struggle to see the moon. The International Dark Sky Association aims to preserve those regions worldwide where the night sky is still pristine.

Most Mid Murray residents already know how incredible the stars can be in this region. We take it for granted that it's like this everywhere. We don't see the stars as an asset. Dark Sky recognition would make the night sky yet another reason to visit the Mid-Murray region.

Darkness is measured on a scale of 0 to 22, with 22 being total darkness. Preliminary measurements in the Mid Murray this January came in at 21.97 – much darker than many accredited regions in the northern hemisphere.

Also, the Astronomical Society of SA (ASSA) says the Mid-Murray region has among the clearest night skies in the state; in particular the area from Cambrai to Sunnydale.

At under 2 hours drive from Adelaide, it is within easy reach. The flat geography of the region also maximises the view of the sky.

- **Where are sites located overseas / in Australia?**

International sites include 36 formally recognised Dark Sky preserves around the world, with 15 in Canada. Other countries with Dark Sky preserves are the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Spain and the United Kingdom. Sites in the United States include Grand Canyon National Park and Kissimmee Prairie Preserve in Florida's wetlands. There is only one Dark Sky reserve in Asia, in South Korea.

Warrumbungle National Park in NSW has recently been declared a Dark Sky Sanctuary. A River Murray Dark Sky Reserve would be the first in SA and just the second in Australia.

- **What is the opportunity for our region? What are the benefits?**

Dark Sky is a year-round attraction, but is best in the colder months, when tourist numbers are lowest. Many amateur astronomers have their own equipment; they just need a place to set up. A 'Dark Sky Trail' could guide visitors to selected camp sites, parks and other suitable locations within the region.

Such visitors generally seek darkness and quiet. As a result they are unlikely to disrupt or disturb local landholders or residents.

Caravan Parks, River shack rentals, landholders, houseboat operators, pubs, petrol stations, bakeries and take-away shops can all benefit from additional year-round visitors. Smaller townships with little or no street lighting, such as Black Hill, Nildottie, Punyelroo or Wongulla, could attract visitors by labelling themselves as 'Dark Sky Friendly'.

More established locations like Meldanda, Ngaut Ngaut and Brookfield could run guided overnight visits with guest speakers.

In addition to regular member events, ASSA runs events for the general public at its observatory, with talks from members and opportunities to use their telescopes and learn about the night sky. This would also bring people to the region.

Local schools can also benefit from links with ASSA and build students and teachers knowledge and confidence in scientific study.

International schools and universities would be able to log in to the telescopes and request time to study particular regions of the sky.

The indigenous night sky is also of great importance, with possible night sky tours for school and community groups, describing indigenous constellations such as the Dark Emu at Ngaut Ngaut in association with the indigenous custodians and ASSA.

- **Who is leading it? Who is involved in it?**

Mid-Murray Landcare has proposed this idea, with generous support from the Mid Murray Council and the Astronomical Society of SA (ASSA).

- **Have you identified specific sites?**

There is potential for Meldanda to become the 'core site' for the Reserve and become a location to operate larger telescopes.

Other potential sites are Towitta Park, Brookfield Conservation Park, Swan Reach Conservation Park, Ridley Conservation Park, Marne River Conservation Park, Ngaut Ngaut and Sunnydale.

Community groups in Bowhill, Blanchetown and Nildottie have already expressed interest in the concept. Several landholders have also expressed interest in providing Dark Sky camp sites.

- **How can I be involved?**

The measurements done by the community will help identify the 'core' location for the Reserve and the outer boundaries of the Dark Sky Reserve. At last we will know just how dark the Mid Murray is.

You are also welcome to write a Letter of Support to be included with the Dark Sky application giving an idea of the level of community backing.

For further information please contact Chris Tugwell on 0414 926 539.

Tell your friends.

Chris Tugwell  
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