

BUAS Bursary Award – 5 years on (Derek Robeson)

Knowledge Exchange programme between the Tweed River Catchment, New South Wales, Australia and the River Tweed Catchment, United Kingdom.

During 2016, Derek Robeson of Tweed Forum was working with various partners on the Scottish Borders Land Use Strategy pilot. The aim of the pilot was to help facilitate a tool to aid land management through targeting opportunities to integrate farming, forestry and conservation better, i.e. to encourage the management and uptake of the most appropriate land use, in the right place and at the right scale.

It was during this time that Derek became aware of the Tweed River Catchment in New South Wales, Australia. By an amazing coincidence, Derek learned that they were also working on a similar land use opportunity mapping programme. Contact was made with Mr Tom Alletson, Team Leader, Waterways Programme Leader at Tweed Shire Council and an invitation was extended to visit Tom and his team in Australia.

Derek applied successfully for a BUAS Bursary and in July 2016 headed off to the Tweed River Catchment. Derek was amazed to learn of so many local connections including the naming of Brisbane City after Sir Thomas Makdougall Brisbane of Makerston House (Governor General New South Wales in 1822), the naming of the Tweed River after our very own river and that Captain James Cook's grandparents came from Ednam.

Derek spent a month in Australia and was kindly shown round all of the Tweed River Catchment. He learned that many of the land management challenges and opportunities that we face here, they are also facing there.

The key land and water management challenges include: increasing intensity of flooding, soil erosion, summer temperatures, risk of fires, diffuse pollution and increasing pressure on natural habitats. There is also an ageing population of farmers and an increase in movement of people towards the coast. Many of these challenges are shared by Scottish Borders and North Northumberland communities also.

Since returning from Australia, Derek has used the knowledge gained from his time in New South Wales on a regular basis. For example, staff from the two Tweeds continue to share knowledge and experiences. In 2019, there were very intense cyclones in eastern Australia that led to extreme flooding. These were more numerous and intense than normal. In 2020, wildfires were more frequent and more extreme than ever before. This is a direct result of Global Warming. People (and wildlife) were impacted hugely.

Whilst Scotland is unlikely to suffer from regular fire risk, extremes in temperatures are likely to be more common, leading to longer periods of drought and also intense rainfall. Weather patterns are changing. Land managers and communities will need to be able to adapt to these changes and to be more resilient.

Within his role at Tweed Forum, Derek continues to work with farmers and other partners to try and help deliver practical projects on the ground that help address the key challenges of Global Warming and Biodiversity Loss.

Experiences from his time visiting the Tweed River in Australia are often relayed in talks and at workshops. Derek contributes regularly to University level education courses where examples from the Australia Tweed are frequently used. The knowledge gained also helps when developing and delivering practical work programmes on the ground with Borders and North Northumberland farmers. Tourism is a shared topic between Australia and the UK and with the upcoming Destination Tweed Programme gathering pace, it is certain that sharing more economic and cultural information with colleagues in Australia will become more frequent and important. This will be especially beneficial for the Borders economy.

The whole experience that the BUAS Bursary helped facilitate was truly wonderful. The knowledge gained and shared and the friendships made are long lasting. The two Tweeds may be at opposite ends of the globe but the challenges and opportunities that both communities face are incredibly similar. It just goes to show how important it is that we all work together to help make the world a better place.



Derek Robeson (extreme right) with members of the Tweed Shire Landcare Group, New South Wales, Australia, (August 2016)



Bankside Rejuvenation Programme, Tweed Shire, New South Wales, Australia