

Merging the waters of the Mardoowarra and the Meuse

by Ian Perdrisat*

Dr Anne Poelina (a 2011 Fellow of the Trust) attended the 'Resilience and Development: Mobilising for Transformation' conference (www.resilience2014.org) in Montpellier, and travelled through France during May, 2014 listening to concerns of scientists and the community about threats to the sustainability of living water systems from activities such as shale gas extraction, mining and chemical-based agriculture.

Standing in the middle of a 2000 year old Roman bridge, Peter Cullen Trust Fellow Dr Anne Poelina, a traditional custodian of the Mardoowarra (Fitzroy River) in the West Kimberley region of Australia, joined hands with Paul Michel, an elder of the small village of Brainville. Together they poured water from the creeks, springs and billabongs of the Fitzroy River valley into the ancient river Meuse deep in the heart of France.

The trip was in response to a visit to the Kimberley by Dr Philippe Vaillant, a French post doctoral research scientist who brought water from the Meuse River to merge with the Mardoowarra in April. The water ceremonies sharing the energy of these great rivers were conducted to promote the need to protect the worlds ancient river systems.

Dr Vaillant's work involves promoting community participation in integrated water planning and management. Prior to the water ceremony Dr Poelina, Ian Perdrisat and Dr Vaillant participated in a workshop, with members of the Brainville community and the La Chenaie de Mambre association, about the need to build resilient river systems.

Many of the world's ancient river systems are threatened by the impact of mining, fracking, damming and extensive agriculture. The French experience has been that resource extraction, industrialisation and agricultural activities involving pesticides and fertilisers have contaminated rivers to the point where the water is unfit for human consumption or swimming.



Dr Philippe Vaillant, Paul Michel, Dr Anne Poelina and Ian Perdrisat with members of the Brainville community conducting the water ceremony. Photo: Sophie Maillard.

Dr Poelina has lodged an objection in the Western Australian Mining Warden's court against the Duchess Paradise thermal coal mine proposed by Rey Resources. She has also sent a submission to the WA EPA Public Environmental Review (PER). A wide range of interest groups including traditional custodians, scientists and environmental groups have also sent submissions to the WA EPA regarding Rey Resources, which wants to establish new coal mining precincts in greenfield wilderness areas such as the Fitzroy River Valley.

'We must learn from the mistakes of the past whether they be in France or the Murray-Darling Basin; we must be



The Roman bridge over the River Meuse. Photo: Sophie Maillard.

guided by evidence in making decisions that once made cannot be undone. You cannot repatriate a poisoned river,' Dr Poelina said.

**Ian Perdrisat is a member of the Mardoowarra community.*