

Olympic Rivers: Restoring Urban Waterways and Creating a Legacy for Future Generations



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#1 SATELLITE EVENT KEY MESSAGES

The International River Foundation

For over twenty years, the International River Foundation (IRF) has championed river resilience to create a legacy of healthy rivers that benefit ecosystems, communities and economies. Through the platform of people, ideas and impact, the IRF collaborates with global partners to help drive river restoration projects worldwide and accelerate action towards resilient rivers for future generations.

2025 International River Symposium

The 25th International River Symposium (IRS), held in Vienna in 2022, highlighted inspiring global efforts to advocate for and protect rivers. Participants emphasised the need for stronger commitments to restoration and protection.

The upcoming 26th IRS will return to the River City of Brisbane from 8–10 September 2025, aligning with the Brisbane Festival.

The event's theme, "River Revolution: Accelerating Solutions for Climate Resilience," underscores the urgency for transformative ideas and actions. Through this event, the IRF aims to inspire innovation and spark practical solutions that address the pressing challenges of climate change.

Satellite Event #1

As a precursor to IRS 2025, the IRF hosted the first in a series of virtual satellite events, exploring insights from the Seine River's ecological transformation during the 2024 Paris Olympic and Paralympic Games. The online event examined how these lessons could inform global practices, including Brisbane's preparations.

The event featured a diverse panel of experts, including Benjamin Raigneau, Head of Sanitation and Water for the City of Paris, who spearheaded the Seine's ecological revival for Paris 2024. Other speakers included Elizabeth Sisson and Rebecca Arnaud from Brisbane City Council, Steve Richards from AmaWaterways, Dr. Bill Dennison from the University of Maryland and Mina Guli from Thirst Foundation.

Nearly 300 participants engaged in discussions on making urban waterways cleaner, more accessible, and integral to tourism and community life. The dialogue underscored the essential role of river restoration in enhancing urban liveability and reclaiming rivers as vital natural and cultural assets.



#1 SATELLITE EVENT KEY MESSAGES



Benjamin Raigneau
Head of Sanitation and Water
Department, City of Paris



Rebecca Arnaud
Manager, Legacy and Games
Planning, Brisbane City Council



Elizabeth Sisson
Manager of Water, Energy
and Environmental Systems,
Brisbane City Council



Steve Richards
Managing Director,
AmaWaterways Australia &
New Zealand



Dr Bill Dennison
Vice President for Science
Applications, University
of Maryland Centre for
Environmental Science



Mina Guli
CEO, Thirst Foundation

A bolder and courageous vision for rivers

Rivers are the heart of cities and society. We need to have a bold vision and set of goals linked to on-ground actions to ensure the resilience of rivers around the world. Paris had a bold vision for the Seine River and the results were positive. The learnings and innovation from the Paris Olympic and Paralympic Games on the Seine River are transferrable to other river cities of the world.

We need the courage to build community including First Nations people

We need to act and we need to do it now. We need to put water on the global agenda – actions that will lead to healthy rivers and clean water.

We need to have the courage to set big bold goals for our rivers not just because they are sources of water but because they are the foundation of our communities and economies. We need to do this together. We can restore our rivers and we can do it now.

A whole-of-system understanding and management is critical for river cities like Brisbane

As a tropical river city that is at the downstream end of a fairly large catchment and a number of local authorities, there is a need to understand and manage the Brisbane River as a whole system, encompassing both upstream and downstream activities, as well as the interconnected economies and communities. Brisbane in comparison to other Olympic and Paralympic Cities has a small population of 1.32 million over a large area of 1,300 square km. As a green city, Brisbane's super power is its natural environment. Brisbane City is committed to its River and has a strong vision for Clean, Green, Sustainable.

Through revitalising our rivers, we ensure a legacy for future generations

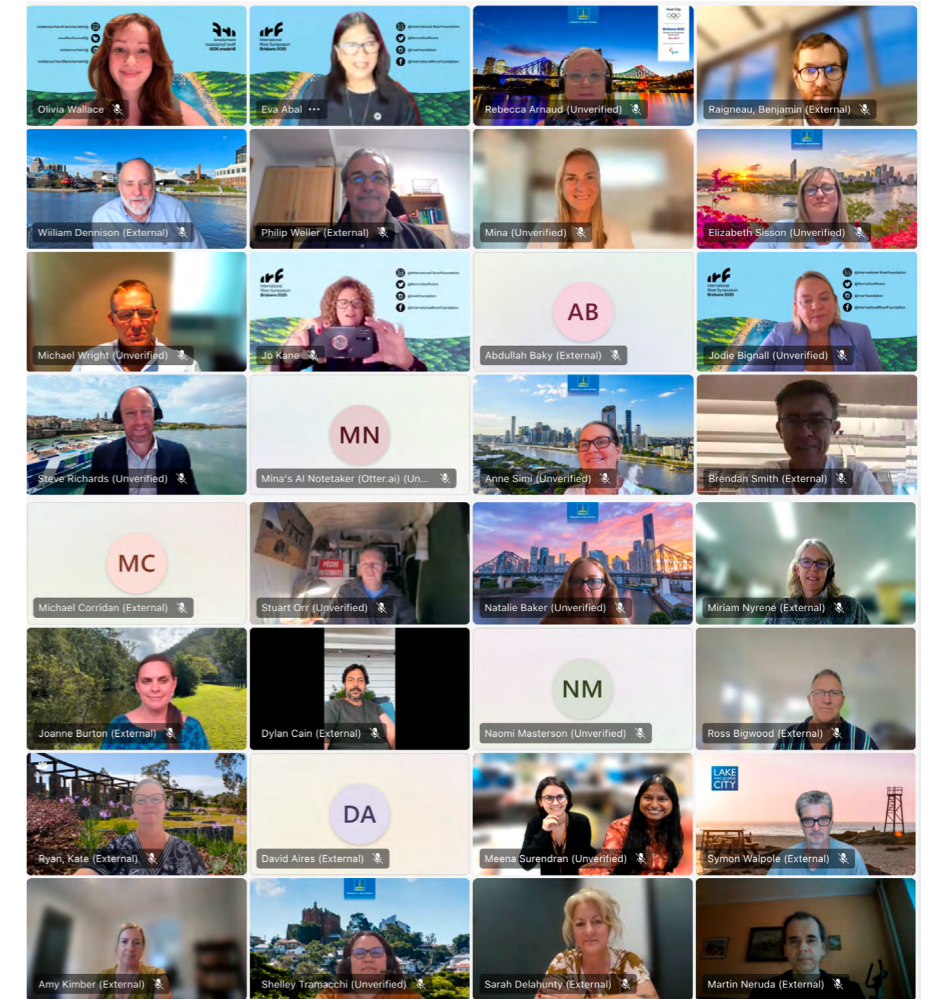
It is crucial to maximise the legacy outcomes of the Olympic and Paralympic Games by using the event to accelerate and amplify existing initiatives, while also developing new projects that are uniquely possible through hosting the Games. We must ensure that our rivers are preserved and accessible for future generations.

Urban Rivers do not need to be Olympic rivers to envision a future where they are swimmable and thrive as vibrant tourism hubs

Cities are showing they can be forward thinking and develop actions for flood protection, water supply, recreation and economic development that acknowledge and work to support this connection through cooperative strategies and planning with municipalities and authorities further upstream. Examples like the future swimmable Baltimore Harbour are worth noting. Without some of the world's most important rivers, industries like cruise companies would not exist. Corporates are cognizant of the impact they have on rivers and local communities and hence their commitment to their vision of sustainability.

It is important to consider nature-based solutions for rivers

We need to balance hard infrastructure with nature-based solutions to achieve river resilience. A holistic view of the city and the landscape that supports it needs to exist, as well as actions that reinforce the role of ecological systems and nature to support mechanisms to achieve healthy, thriving and resilient rivers.



Olympic and Paralympic Games can bring a range of opportunities to a city and its rivers

The Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games will provide opportunities for regional connectivity, job creation and a global identity of Brisbane as a river city. It provides the opportunity to position the region as a global destination for tourism, trade and investment.

Effective governance, dedicated investments, partnerships and community support cannot be underestimated

The strengthening and building of existing governance mechanisms and mobilisation and involvement of communities and partners within the river basin are essential for short- and long-term success. Strong leadership/governance frameworks, dedicated sufficient investments, partnerships and community involvement are key to revitalising urban waterways.