



Article from:

## The return of Lake Condah

---

| December 14, 2011

0 tweet



Bright future: Joseph Saunders (inset) says Aborigines are overjoyed to see Lake Condah flooding back to life.

### **A LAKE has restored Aboriginal pride, writes KATE DOWLER**

The Gunditjmarra people have their heart back.

Lake Condah, in the state's far southwest, has a new weir and has filled again, more than 60 years after it was drained and when the local people living off it were housed in a mission.

With the lake rejuvenated, the Aboriginal community is taking another major step: Getting the traditional Budj Bim landscape World Heritage listed by UNESCO.

If they achieve it, the listing will provide a major boon for the region and for employment.

Twenty-six year-old Gunditjmarra man Joseph Saunders says the community elders have pushed for many years

for Lake Condah to be restored.

"It's wonderful to have it filled and see wildlife coming back," Joseph says.

"And to see how the system works and how fishtraps would have worked.

"For the elders, I think it has filled a gap in their lives.

"We can have peace in our hearts now."

Joseph says the Gunditjmara community has big plans and World Heritage listing would help the area again become a place of prosperity.

Earlier this year, he says, experts in archaeology, geology, hydrology and the historical and cultural values of the Budj Bim National Heritage Landscape gathered at Heywood to discuss the steps needed for listing.

Joseph says if successful, the listing would revive the community's dreams of getting eel traps working again, along with an eco-village, producing income and job opportunities.

He says Lake Condah has a unique history as one of Australia's first aquaculture ventures, being a source of sustainable food and a place of year-round settlement for his forebears for thousands of years.

For millennia, the Gunditjmara people channelled water into traps to harvest fish and eels, which were smoked.

They dug ponds and wetlands, linked by channels containing weirs.

Woven baskets placed in these weirs harvested the eels, allowing permanent, stone-hut settlements.

But European settlement led to conflicts known as the Eumerella wars, displacing many Aboriginal people.

The then government built reserves to house them, including a mission at Lake Condah, which operated until the 1950s.

Ken Saunders, Joseph's father, was raised at the mission and says restoring water to Lake Condah has been a goal for the community since the 1970s.

The leader and Glenelg shire councillor says he always dreamed of the landscape being restored.

Ken says the process began in 2008, when Lake Condah was returned to the Gunditjmara people and last year they built a weir, which was refilled after heavy rain last June.

Ken says 10 years ago achieving UNESCO World Heritage listing was no more than a pipe dream.

"It would be a good thing for people here, white fellas and black fellas together," Ken says.

[Follow weeklytimesnow.com.au on Twitter](https://www.weeklytimesnow.com.au)

#### Share this article

- [Digg this](#)
- [Post to del.icio.us](#)
- [Post to Newsvine](#)
- [Post to Facebook](#)
- [Add to kwoff](#)

- [Fark](#)
- [Post to Stumble Upon](#)
- [RSS](#)
- [What is this?](#)

Weekly Times is not responsible for the content of external sites.

---

[Print this story](#)

---

The Weekly Times Pty Ltd Copyright © 2008