

Spring 2001

ISSUE 21

L *Victorian* **andcare** & CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT



Rejuvenating the Mallee



GIS in the Woody Yaloak

21st anniversary issue

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Natural Resources
and Environment

AGRICULTURE
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Vacancies on the Victorian Women in Agriculture and Resource Management Advisory Group

The Secretary, Department of Natural Resources and Environment (NRE), is seeking suitably experienced and interested women who have an involvement in agriculture and/or resource management industries to fill positions with the Victorian Women in Agriculture and Resource Management Advisory Team.

The Victorian Women in Agriculture and Resource Management Advisory Team (VicWARM) comprises up to 20 women who are involved in various agriculture and resource management industries and senior NRE and Industry Representatives.

VicWARM represents an innovative mechanism through which productive relationships and exchanges between NRE and women involved in agriculture and resource management are facilitated, as a step towards recognising and increasing the participation of women in sector leadership and decision making roles thus enhancing the capacity of their communities.

The role of VicWARM is to work in partnership with NRE to provide strategic advice and feedback on:

- Ways of encouraging greater participation of women in leadership and decision making roles within agriculture and resource management through overseeing the implementation of the Victorian Action Plan for Women in Agriculture and Resource Management; and
- Issues, programs and policies, referred to it by NRE or identified by VicWARM members.

This role provides a pathway for women's skills, expertise and needs to inform program and policy development and delivery.

VicWARM meets five times per year. Advisory team members receive sitting fees and all costs associated with meeting attendance are reimbursed.

The initial appointment will be for a period of two years.

NRE is seeking expressions of interest from women of a variety of ages, cultural backgrounds, regions and industries, particularly, but not exclusively, those of natural resource management, fish/seafood, forestry, mining/petroleum or newly emerging industries.

Interested individuals should submit their resume, including a clear indication of their involvement in agriculture / resource management and community activities, to:

**Sharan Otto,
13 / 8 Nicholson St,
East Melbourne, 3002.**

**Applications close:
14 September 2001**

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Mallee wheat by Andrew Chapman

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Victorian Landcare and Catchment Management is published for the Victorian Landcare community by the Victorian Farmers Federation in partnership with the Department of Natural Resources and Environment, Alcoa World Alumina Australia, the Victorian Catchment Management Council and the Natural Heritage Trust.



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RURAL FINANCE

From the editors

After five years, 20 issues and around 300,000 words of copy, the *Victorian Landcare and Catchment Management* magazine has finally come of age. We hope you enjoy our 21st anniversary issue. Thanks are due to our partners, sponsors, advertisers and readers for making the magazine what it is today.

Reader survey

In this issue of the *Victorian Landcare and Catchment Management* magazine we are setting out to discover what you think.

We urge you to complete the reader survey form on page 19 and return it in the envelope provided. Reader surveys help us to make sure the magazine is meeting the needs of readers and by returning your form you will be in the running to win some great prizes.

Victorian Landcare and Farm Management Awards

Applications for the 2001/2002 Victorian Landcare and Farm Management Awards have now closed and NRE reports there has been a good response across all categories.

The applications will be passed on to experienced judging panels who have the difficult task of assessing them. See the next issue for a further update on the awards.

Please keep your stories and letters coming. We are always interested in hearing from our readers.

Lyall Grey,
Jo Safstrom and
Carrie Tiffany



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SUPPORTING LANDCARE –

how it's done in the south-west



The South-West Landcare Project aims to provide the support structures required by Landcare groups to maintain motivation and commitment over the long term. It is an integrated, three-year project which supports Landcare groups in the Glenelg-Hopkins and Corangamite regions.

The project team consists of seven highly skilled members located in Ararat, Ballarat, Colac, Geelong, Hamilton and Warnambool.

The travelling roadshow

A 1999 survey of Landcare groups across the south-west identified four key areas of concern. These were communication; leadership; priority setting and catchment planning; and understanding grant applications and project reporting. These issues have become the basis of the team-developed project plan.

The survey results were presented in a travelling roadshow around the region where team members performed the Landcare News Hour – a mock television show including an anchorman, interviews with team members, on-the-spot reporters, newsbreaks and even an advertisement!

Notes and newsletters

To assist in streamlining administration processes, each Landcare group in the region received a large information folder containing inserts for the group to enter their personal administrative details, priorities and projects as well as current funding, employment and technical information.

A series of 23 Landcare notes have been developed. These notes form the basis of skills training at facilitated Landcare group and network meetings, as well as professional development for Landcare co-ordinators. The notes cover administration; group development, co-ordination and operations; and project planning and funding. As far as we can tell, these notes are the first in Australia to address these issues.

Funding information kits were also circulated to groups. These kits contain grant information for individuals and community groups in south-west Victoria, a calendar showing grant periods throughout the year, a site planner and a Landcare note on grant applications.

In Glenelg-Hopkins, a small regional newsletter, *The Landcare Update*, was developed. The award-winning Geelong Landcare Network newsletter, *Landcare News*, has been expanded to include 2000 Landcare members in the Corangamite region and *The Landcare Update* followed suit in October 2000.

Action plans and workshops

Team members have established a pro-forma to assist Landcare groups and co-ordinators to identify local group priorities.



Bronte Payne, Meredith Hartley and Peter Forster present the travelling roadshow.

This process has proved to be very popular, with many regions across the State interested in taking it up. Once groups have established priorities, they are able to undertake works that are important to all members and that meet regional priorities.

Team members are running a series of workshops at the Victorian Landcare Centre, Creswick. The two workshops held in April and June were a great success, with a mixture of Landcare group members, co-ordinators, NRE and CMA staff attending.

On 28 October 2001 a workshop on communication titled, 'Agreeing, disagreeing and still having fun,' will be held.

South-West Landcare Project team members are keen to see their work utilised by as many different groups as possible. For more information contact Jude Niemiec on (03) 5333 6558. Landcare notes can be accessed on-line via the NRE web at: www.nre.vic.gov.au/notes



The South-West Landcare Project team. Standing (left to right): Ross Jones, Bronte Payne and Nicole Blackett. Sitting (left to right): Jude Niemiec, David Lean, Peter Forster and Meredith Hartley.



HEALTHY LANDSCAPES – Sustainable Communities

The Landcare movement has been operating in Victoria for 15 years and has become a focus for community participation in natural resource management. During this time it has developed, evolved and turned to new issues and challenges.

It was recognised at the International Landcare 2000 Conference, that significant steps should be taken to support Landcare into the future. To initiate this the Minister for Environment and Conservation, Sherryl Garbutt, announced the formation of the Second Generation Landcare Taskforce.

Taskforce members have extensive on-ground experience and practical roles in community Landcare, together with expertise in other fields such as catchment management, business and agriculture. They are Geoff Howard, MLA, Drew English, Jason Alexandra, Merna Curnow, John Claringbould, Janine Haddow, Coral Love, Alison Teese, Richard Weatherly and Mike Gooley from NRE as the Executive Officer.

The taskforce was asked to:

- ensure that the Landcare movement continues to grow and remains a cornerstone of natural resource management in Victoria;
- evaluate the environmental, economic and social impacts of Landcare in Victoria;

- consider the natural resource issues currently facing Landcare and Victoria and assess how Landcare can best be supported and resourced to address these; and
- suggest priority areas for maximising the impact of Landcare into the future.

The taskforce has developed a draft action plan for Second Generation Landcare titled *Healthy Landscapes – Sustainable Communities*. The plan is the result of an extensive round of community consultation with numerous meetings and a State Landcare Workshop held in March.

The draft action plan provides the basis for government to engage the wider community in dialogue concerning the next decade of Landcare. This requires the government and the community to fully consider their roles in natural resource management and their responsibilities with respect to Landcare.

The draft action plan has two parts: Landcare and its Context; and Future Directions. Each part is then broken into sections and action areas that have specific actions and timeframes. The action areas are:

Strengthening investment.

Long-term investment and a whole-of-government effort is required to build community capacity to address major natural resource management issues and rural decline.

Reinvigorating support.

The need for new support for existing Landcare groups and the need to broaden the Landcare support base to include more land managers and urban communities.

Fostering communication, education and awareness.

Increasing awareness for natural resource management and rural decline issues is required to address the complexity and difficulty of the issues and approaches.

Enhancing Landcare's ability to contribute to natural resource management.

Increased resource degradation demands better alignment and targeting of action.

The taskforce is keen to gather as much information as possible so that the partnership between government, the Landcare community and the private sector is strengthened. This is an opportunity for you to have your say.

Copies of the draft Action Plan, together with consultation forms, can be obtained from the NRE Customer Service Centre on 136 186. The closing date for submissions is 28 September 2001.

Above: Members of the Second Generation Landcare Taskforce (from left), Coral Love, Mike Gooley (Executive Officer), Janine Haddow, Richard Weatherly, Alison Teese, John Claringbould, Geoff Howard (Chair) and Merna Curnow. Absent: Jason Alexandra and Drew English.

John Fyfe's 40 years of Landcare

By Kym Witney-Soanes



John Fyfe has an outstanding Landcare ethic, which he says, was inspired by the early settlers of the Portland coastal district of south-west Victoria. He demonstrates this by his enormous voluntary commitment to the local farming community.

The Fyfe family purchased their 30-cow, 160-acre dairy farm in 1960. The property now totals 900 acres, carrying 400 dairy cows and 200 replacements. Their enterprise is an exceptional example of sustainable agricultural management – especially in an intensive animal industry.

One of the keys to sustainability on the property is the large areas of protected remnant vegetation and sites replanted with local vegetation species, 85 acres of which are under a conservation covenant.

John Fyfe on the Surry River. This site has been revegetated and has had a fish ladder installed by the local CMA.

“A seven kilometre stretch of the Surry River forms the central corridor of native remnant and replanted bush through our farm where we have fenced out the river (averaging 25 metres on each side) to exclude stock,” said John.

Nutrients are managed by 25 metre buffer zones along waterways. Around 15% of the property is under native vegetation which is critical in maintaining farm productivity by improving water quality and providing effective shelterbelts. The shelterbelts provide significant protection from the elements for dairy herds by reducing calf deaths and contributing to increased milk production.

“In a cold spell we expect to halve our loss of milk production. Shelterbelts also provide summer shade for stock and habitat for native birds that control pasture pests, resulting in improvements in overall pasture quality,” said John.

The Fyfes are doubling the amount of roadside vegetation adjoining the property by refencing five to 10 metres back into the paddocks to allow self-regeneration.

In 1990 the Fyfes and the Panozzo family established the Surry River Landcare Group. The group has undertaken protection and re-establishment works focusing on the riparian zone and wetlands and assisted in developing the Surry River Restoration Plan. They are currently implementing an NHT project in partnership with the Glenelg-Hopkins CMA to protect and revegetate a 48 kilometre stretch of the river.

Over the last five years the Fyfes have employed two assistants. Brad Spring is part of the Portland Outreach Program and is partly sponsored by the Glenelg-Hopkins CMA. He collects native seed in the Surry catchment and stores it at the Portland seedbank before growing seedlings at the Kyeama Centre and Seawind Nursery in Portland. He plants the tubestock along the Surry River and the district beyond. Brad is 22 and has a disability caused by a falling accident when he was 16. Trevor Brown, an enthusiastic farm assistant, supports Brad in the revegetation works.

The Fyfes lead by example. They are innovative producers who successfully balance productivity with nature conservation.



Trevor Brown (left) and Brad Spring working on one of the Surry River Landcare Group revegetation projects east of Portland.

A powerful new project for Millewa-Carwarp

By Matt Crawley, Scott Gibson and Rob Youl

Millewa-Carwarp Landcare Group is one of Victoria's oldest and biggest, covering the wheatbelt between the SA border, the Murray and the Sunset Country and the extensive Murray-Sunset National Park. Members have always worked hard to involve local companies in regional Landcare activities, with a special focus on soil management.

Now the group has moved into a wider arena and has set an interesting example to other groups and networks looking to commercialise their skills and earn income.

The group has been employed by the Murraylink Transmission Company to revegetate areas of power line after cable laying to achieve a net gain for biodiversity. The transmission company is involved in the construction of an underground high voltage direct current (HVDC) electricity interconnector between Red Cliffs in Victoria and Berri in South Australia

The net gain in vegetation is a win-win for the environment and community. Much of the net gain in vegetation will be concentrated on the threatened Belah woodland communities, providing excellent opportunities to rehabilitate these fragmented sites.

The Murraylink contract allocates \$12,000 for a direct seeder, which the group will retain after the project has been completed. The rest of the money will be put towards on-ground works.

Matt Crawley, the group's co-ordinator, says the direct seeder will accelerate revegetation throughout the very extensive Millewa district.

"Direct seeding is very cost-effective up here for restoring indigenous vegetation. And this new partnership with the electricity industry means we're not depending on government sources, but helping move our group towards self-determination."

A network for Landcare professionals

By Jude Niemiec

Are you a Landcare co-ordinator? facilitator? project officer? educator? Do you have skills, technical experience and triumphs to share with others in the same field? Do you want to explore issues that affect your groups? Are you uncertain about how to achieve the goals you have been set?

The Victorian Landcare Co-ordinators and Facilitators Network provides an opportunity for people working in Landcare to see what others are doing and acquire some professional development at the same time.

The network helps to sustain Landcare professionals, many of whom work in isolation. Network members communicate through regular, central meetings and an annual roving regional forum. The network strengthens the capacity of individuals to assist the groups they support or are employed by.

State forum at Corangamite

The first Landcare Co-ordinators and Facilitators Forum was held in November 1997 at Rowsley. Over two days, Landcare support staff from groups and networks, NRE, CMAs, local government, education and other agencies considered strategies and activities to enhance the embryonic role of the Landcare professional.

From this initial get-together, a network to support Victoria's Landcare professionals was formed. The network operates via a committee of representatives from across the State. The committee meets every two months, with regional members co-ordinating a State gathering each year.

The successful Rowsley forum was the first of what is now an annual event. Since 1997, network forums have been held at Taggerty, Grantville and Beechworth, celebrating the commitment to – and positive impact on – Landcare communities and the environment.

This year's forum will be held at Corangamite from 11-14 November. In a region important for its remaining native grasslands, the forum will have a grassland focus.

Ray Thomas discusses the Regent Honeyeater project during the Landcare Co-ordinators and Facilitators Network forum at Beechworth last year.

Organisation is well underway for the various workshops, tours and panel discussions.

Growing momentum

To be effective, the network depends on its awareness of Landcare issues and concerns across Victoria. Regional issues are brought to the State meetings for discussion, ideas and solutions. Major concerns, such as standard employment conditions and professional development opportunities, are dealt with at a State level, together with general Landcare issues.

As the momentum of the network grows, so does its voice. Members have contributed to the Second Generation Landcare Taskforce and to State and regional Landcare support strategies.

The Victorian Landcare Co-ordinators and Facilitators Network is also a valuable information resource. For example, the complex impacts of GST on Landcare were made less confusing by the circulation across the State of advice and information packages developed by co-ordinators for their own regions.

Any person involved in a professional capacity in Landcare as a co-ordinator, facilitator, project manager or educator, regardless of who employs them, is welcome to join the network at no cost.

For more information on the network contact Brenan Wotherspoon at the VFF on (03) 9207 5555. For more information about the Corangamite forum contact Jude Niemiec on (03) 5333 6558.



WILLOWS – friend or foe?



By Margrit Beemster

Hugh Giltrap, a third generation farmer, remembers, as a child, helping his dad plant willows along the banks of the Mitta River, which runs through his 200 hectare dairy farm at the top end of the Mitta Valley.

“The old timers had cleared all the trees down to the river so they planted the willows to stop erosion. I suppose they looked pretty, grew quickly and, in the early days, did the job.”

But as the years have gone by, the willows – mostly basket but a few black and weeping ones, many of which have

reached or are reaching the end of their life – have become a giant headache.

When the willows die they often fall into the river causing the river to flow around the debris, scouring the bank out in the process. They shade out any native trees, shrubs or grasses that attempt to grow along the banks. In winter, when the willows have lost their leaves, the view from the river looking up to the banks is of bare trunks and bare ground, easily prone to erosion.

Even though Hugh has been concerned about the problem of the willows for years, to tackle the job on his own would have been an enormous task.

However, with the assistance of the North East Catchment Management Authority and Goulburn Murray Water, the problem, on his property at least, is being overcome.

The authority has joined with Hugh in an ambitious two-year project to rid the banks of willows on his property – a couple of kilometres – and revegetate with native vegetation. The willows have all, except for one corner, been poisoned.

“It took five blokes a fortnight to do it all,” says Hugh, who is fencing off the riverbank with materials paid for by the authority. His cattle will have access to the river but only at selected spots.

The authority has contracted Indigo Way to plant a wide selection of native trees, shrubs and grasses including river red gums, river bottlebrushes, tree violets, slender and burghan tea trees, blackwood and silver wattles, common tussock grasses and rushes and sedges.

It will also bring in an excavator to snig out many of the larger willows, some of which are 15 metres high.

“At least if we do it this way, we do it once and then we can forget about it,” says Hugh.

“I’m happy to keep a check on the blackberries and any rabbits. Native vegetation looks after itself. You don’t have to prune it or anything like that and it regenerates.

“The response from the authority has been tremendous,” says Hugh, who approached them for assistance earlier this year. “There has been no pressure. It’s something I wanted to happen and I hope it will show others, by example, what can be done.”

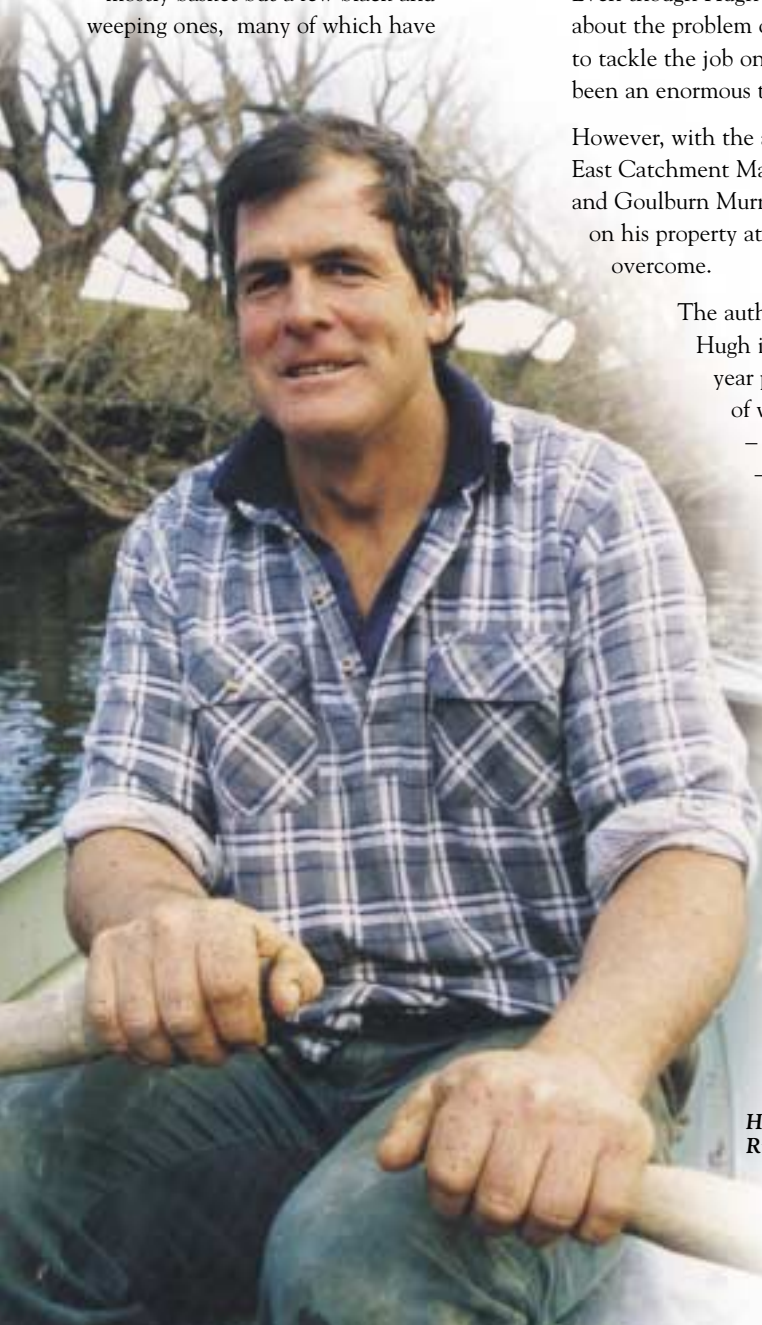
The project on Hugh Giltrap’s property is one of many the NECMA is undertaking this year as part of its River Health Program for managing problem willows.

“A lot of people believe willows do a good job to stabilise the banks and in the short term they do,” says Veronica Lanigan from the NECMA.

“But in the long term they cause management problems when they choke streams and self-propagate in areas where they are not wanted, particularly the middle of streams. Our program will continue to work with farmers such as Hugh to improve overall river health.”

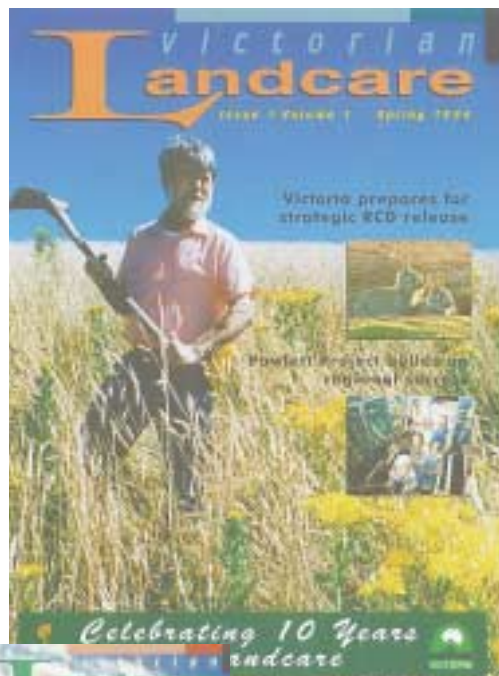
For further information contact Veronica Lanigan on (02) 6055 6133.

Hugh Giltrap wants to see the banks of the Mitta River lined with native vegetation, not willows.



HAPPY ANN

Victorian Landcare and



In the first week of September 1996, *Victorian Landcare* number one rolled off the presses. The feature story, by Barry Clugston, tracked the first 10 years of Landcare and showed some dramatic before and after photographs of Terry Simpson's property at Winjallok.

The *Victorian Landcare* magazine replaced two former newsletters, *Trunkline*, produced by the Victorian Farmers Federation and *Salt Force News*, produced by the Department of Natural Resources and Environment. With major support from Alcoa World Alumina Australia, the magazine has become a major communication vehicle for the Victorian Landcare community.

In 1999 the magazine was renamed *Victorian Landcare and Catchment Management*, reflecting a broader approach to natural resource management. Looking back over the last 20 issues shows the vibrant and dynamic nature of Landcare.

The magazine has covered an enormous range of stories and issues: the Victorian Landcare and Farm Management Awards; the creation of the regional Catchment

Management Authorities; the scourge of serrated tussock; the release of RCD and the aim for rabbit-free farms;

farmers and greenhouse; the blue gum debate; new and emerging industries; junior Landcare; fox control; direct seeding techniques; water management; and salinity – just to name a few. It is certainly a good argument against the naive proposition that Landcare is just about tree planting.

The editors would like to thank all of the people who have helped in creating the magazine – especially the partners, sponsors and advertisers. We would also like to thank our readers, whose enthusiastic support makes it all worthwhile.

"This 21st edition of the Victorian Landcare and Catchment Management magazine represents another milestone in this important channel for communication within the Landcare and catchment management family."

I would like to congratulate all those contributors to the magazine for making it such a respected and useful publication. With the recent release of the Second Generation Landcare Taskforce and its report, it is important that we all reflect on the major contribution the Landcare movement has made to the well-being of communities and the health of our land and water resources and the challenges ahead. I am sure the magazine will continue to be an important source of inspiration to, and knowledge sharing between, Landcarers."

I would also like to thank Peter Walsh, as President of the VFF, for the continued partnership between VFF and NRE in producing the magazine. Happy 21st!"

Peter Sutherland, Director, Catchment and Water Division, NRE.

"As the Victorian Farmers Federation is a founding partner in this excellent publication, I am excited that it has stood the test of time in the marketplace."

It has spread the Landcare message and motivated people to look towards good natural resource



IVERSARY!

Catchment Management is

21

management by highlighting the achievements of farmers and community groups. Today's farmers take a holistic approach to management and practice sustainability to survive into the future.

Congratulations to the editorial team, the writers from across Victoria who seek out the articles and, particularly, the Landcare groups, farmers and individuals who are carrying out the inspiring work highlighted in the magazine over the last 20 issues."

Peter Walsh, VFF President.

"The Victorian Landcare and Catchment Management magazine's 21st edition represents a milestone in communicating community Landcare achievements in Victoria.

Alcoa's Landcare Project focuses on on-ground outcomes and building stronger local communities by assisting groups to implement innovations in local area and catchment management practices. The sharing of information between individuals and groups is central to our commitment to the Landcare community and is the reason for our strong support for the magazine.

Alcoa congratulates the Victorian Landcare community for adopting the Victorian Landcare and Catchment Management magazine as a lead communications tool."

Joan McGovern, Public Relations & Landcare Manager, Victorian Operations, Alcoa World Alumina Australia.

"This publication is informative and keeps groups throughout Victoria in touch with each other. It is important to realise that fellow Landcarers face similar issues as other groups in distant catchments. I also believe this magazine assists with maintaining enthusiasm within Landcare.

Congratulations for five years of great support to Landcare."

Craig Tuhan, Chairman, Goulburn Murray Landcare Network.

"Congratulations on getting to such a milestone with the magazine. We look forward to reading it and it is always passed around at our meetings. I think that without such publications updated information would not reach all corners of the Landcare community. To all those involved in the production, well done and may we continue to see and read the fruits of your labour."

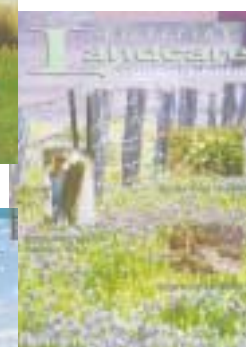
Peter Wheeler, Bald Hills Creswick Landcare Group.

"The Victorian Landcare and Catchment Management magazine provides an excellent balance of interesting and newsy items in a very readable, well-illustrated format. Congratulations on the coming of age. It has an obvious people focus and is a valuable communicator towards achieving sustainable agriculture, land and water management."

Greg Smith, Rutherglen.

"Despite being seriously 'time-poor' I always endeavour to read the Landcare magazine. The interesting, informative and easily digestible stories give me an overview of Landcare and catchment activities across the State and help me keep in touch. Congratulations on your 21st issue!"

Jan Boynton, Regional Manager, North West Region, NRE.





Rejuvenating

By John Quinlan

Early struggle

The first years of Mallee settlement were a real battle for the early settlers. They were characterised by keen struggle, want of capital, scratch methods of farming and sometimes deep despondency. The district had no reputation for either farming or grazing. After the devastating drought of 1902 it was seriously suggested, at government level, that the few early pioneers be removed to localities south of the 36th parallel (roughly a line through Birchip).

But the Mallee was destined to become the granary of the State. The practice of fallowing, the use of superphosphate and better varieties such as the new wheat Federation – coupled with some good years in the next two or three decades – saw it start to really fulfill its potential. By the 1920s almost 50% of Victoria's wheat was grown in the Mallee and almost 80% of the Mallee area cropped was sown to wheat.

Dr Jeff Unkovich, the Manager of the Science Group at the Victorian Institute of Dryland Agriculture, says that while current farming systems are reasonably profitable, there is an unhealthy dependence on cereal crops. Some 60% of arable farmland is either in fallow or annual pasture each year, bringing in little or no income.

Dust is a major problem. So is recharge to groundwater, because farming systems are not utilising the rainfall effectively.

While agricultural produce from the Mallee is valued at approximately \$400 million annually, there have been concerns in recent years that productivity improvements haven't kept pace with those in higher rainfall areas. Under a project funded by the Science and Technology Innovation initiative of the Victorian Government, Jeff Unkovich and his team have begun a long-term project to look at suitable alternative farming systems for the Mallee.

Long fallow a lost opportunity

According to Jeff Unkovich, long fallows are economically a lost opportunity and are not an environmentally friendly land use system.

Jeff Unkovich says fallow from the previous July or August is wasteful when farmers could be using the spring rainfall for some form of production. Also, the notion that a fallow stores water for the following crop is also now being questioned. Scientific data doesn't support the supposed soil moisture benefits of fallowing, for a number of reasons.

- High clay contents are needed in the subsoil to store moisture. This is extremely variable across the Mallee.
- Sufficient rain in the spring is required to fully charge the soil profile yet rainfall is highly variable.
- There are subsoil constraints. Much of the moisture is stored below one metre, often out of the range of plant roots.

Jeff Unkovich is the first to agree that there are a number of definite, proven benefits from fallow. "Fallow provides some water in some cases; gives mechanical control of weeds; assists mineralisation of nitrogen; and helps control disease. It also permits timeliness of sowing. Even with minimum tillage and direct drilling some preparation may be needed, resulting in lost time."

Jeff Unkovich's research is looking at alternatives to the current wasteful system.

The search for alternatives

One of the problems with alternatives is that establishment costs of canola and grain legumes are usually much higher than cereals. This becomes critical in a low-rainfall environment, where margins are slim anyway.

the Mallee



Research
Results



Cereals usually give some sort of return because they are more reliable in tough conditions. The quest is to find systems with lower input costs so that, if yields are low, potential dollar losses are reduced. One way forward is to use a combination of grain crops together (say mustard and peas) in a self-regenerating system as we already have for pastures.

Vetch is very popular in the Mallee. It is a multi-purpose plant which can be used either for grain, grazing or hay, depending on how the season goes. It is also a useful replacement for pasture, but it needs grazing animals.

Other multi-purpose crops are needed, for example, some new peas, which can also be used for grazing and hay to provide stock with feed in a poor season when crops are likely to fail.

“We need improved perennial pasture, forage and tree crops. We need to cover the landscape more and have a wider range of tools for our farmers to use,” says Jeff Unkovich.

The case for livestock

The northern Mallee is a 250mm rainfall zone and is on the fringe of the rangeland, where grazing is about the only thing that is viable. In low rainfall years crops will fail but farmers usually get something from livestock. So a livestock enterprise is a valuable buffer.

Stock are also important in weed management. In higher rainfall areas higher grain protein has been recorded after more intense grazing of pasture in the previous year. This is also likely to occur in lower rainfall regions. So, for a number of reasons, sheep must be considered an integral part of any farming enterprise in the region.

Another problem being addressed by the research is spatial variation. Farmers may have a problem with boron, pH, salt and sodicity – all within 100 metres. What will grow well on one area won't grow on another. Farmers need to know how to manage this variation.

Mallee Sustainable Farming Project

The Mallee Sustainable Farming Project (MSFP) is a farmer-driven group trying to address some of the same issues as Jeff Unkovich and his researchers. The MSFP encourages farmers to work with local agronomists and advisers and to be a part of a TOPCROP group.

The MSFP monitors focus paddocks throughout the Mallee for their sustainability and productivity. Data on soil erosion and groundwater recharge is reported back to farmer group meetings, along with yields and gross margins.

The group has only been operating for three years but is already seeing farmers trialling more sustainable practices.

The Mallee abounds with problems, but it also abounds with opportunities. The long-term vision of Jeff Unkovich and his team is a more biologically diverse dryland farming system which will reduce salinity and soil erosion and increase farm profitability.

For today's Mallee farmers the challenge is not one of basic survival faced by their forebears, but of adapting to better farming methods to reduce land degradation and improve productivity.



This classic picture, taken in February 1983, shows Melbourne about to be blanketed by dust from the Mallee.



Woody farmers look to IT for nei

The Woody Yaloak Catchment Group has consistently turned to innovation in its quest to achieve sustainable land and water resource management within the group's catchment area.

Alice Knight, group chairperson, believes that communities operating across large areas have much to gain from looking into new information technology-based planning tools.

"We need to utilise new technology to help our farmers in planning to manage their natural resources, and from a group management perspective we need it to help monitor our progress," she said.

Five years in the making, the Woody Yaloak Catchment Group – with the assistance of Rick Pope from NRE – has developed such a tool.

Where it all began

In 1995, landholders in the Pittong-Hoyles Creek – a sub-catchment of the Woody Yaloak – were involved in a GIS project carried out by Rick Pope during his postgraduate studies.

Undergraduate students, including local Bradsdale farmer Susie Ellis, worked on the project helping Rick collect information about issues such as hydrogeology, pests, salinity and soils.

"The GIS was basically a graphical database made up of different layers of information laid over an aerial photograph of the Pittong-Hoyles Creek catchment," Rick said.

The project was the first step and, having seen its usefulness, the group was keen to see Rick develop a simpler CD-based GIS which local farmers could use on their own personal computers.

"The CD-GIS was well accepted by the farmers in the local area, but it proved difficult for the landholders involved to update with new information," Rick said.

Streets ahead

One of the constraints to the community's goal was the high cost of GIS software.

"The Woody group was fortunate enough to have one copy of a GIS program called MapInfo, and even more fortunate to have the expertise of Susie Ellis to maintain and develop a GIS for the whole catchment," Rick said.

"If the project was to succeed, a simplified GIS mapping program would have to be found that was cheaper and simpler – one simple enough for the most 'techno-phobic' person to use."

Susie described the Streets Ahead GIS program as the simple mapping software they were looking for.

"Quite simply, it meant we could draw-in features such as erosion works, plantations and weed infestations, and attach project information such as site notes and fact sheets," she said.

The program allows farmers to view aerial photos and contour information at a 'paddock scale'.



Susie Ellis working on the GIS program in the Golden Plains Shire office.

The 1:10,000 scale allows farmers to see trees and rocks within a paddock, helping them visualise their planned farm works.

Landholders – with the help of co-ordinators – can now use the Streets Ahead interface to enter their information which in turn is uploaded into the MapInfo GIS by Susie.

The GIS is now very detailed. Rick explained that it was easy to keep adding layers upon layers to a GIS, but stressed that they had to make sure it was simple enough for everybody to use.

"Technical data such as hydrogeological information that needs technical interpretation can be confusing, but sometimes misleading unless interpreted correctly," he said.

Not just pretty colours – local farmers and neighbourhood groups

The Streets Ahead program has opened the door to local farmers keen to move their farm plans from the aerial photo to the computer.

According to the Woody Yaloak Neighbourhood Groups Facilitator, Jen Clarke, the simplified software has led to a steady increase in the use of the GIS.

"It is easy to produce maps at a farm level, develop farm plans and it greatly simplifies the measurement of paddock areas and boundaries.



Woody Farmers can now monitor their achievements on the GIS.

ghbourhood farm planning



By Paul Crock



Neighbourhood groups can now plan their projects to link up across sub-catchments.

As our neighbourhood groups expand, the GIS concept is being adopted by more and more adjoining landholders as a tool in planning their cross-boundary local projects," she said.

"For cross-boundary project planning it is proving very useful. Farmers are using it to study achievements in other areas of the catchment and with a click of a button learn from each others' experiences."

Looking over the hill – a neighbourhood tool for regional plans

Alice Knight says the GIS project has matured at the right time for the community.

"Since the catchment project started in 1993, we have made enormous steps forward in catchment management at productive, environmental and especially social levels," she said.

"The GIS project has helped us focus our achievements and represent them graphically to our catchment partners.

"The aggregation of 'site' or project information allows us to document and represent the changes brought about in

our catchment over time, both to our funding partners and ourselves.

"One of the most important contributions the GIS has made for partnership relations, is the ability of the Woody Yaloak Catchment Group to contribute information (collected at a grass roots level) in a professional form that is compatible with local, regional and state planners' software."

Alice explained that in the past, the information has often been from the top down – 'here are the regional salinity hot spots', 'here is a statewide weed map', 'here is a local roadside weed plan' and so on.

"The community members now have the same tools and can contribute back up the channel with local information – here is *our* local area – here are the weeds that *we* have controlled – here are the salinity areas that *we* have treated.

"The ability to demonstrate our achievements to our catchment partners is very important. To show our needs clearly, and how they fit with local, regional and State priorities is crucial to our success in maximising future funding opportunities," she said.

Since the catchment project was initiated in 1993, Alcoa has been a major supporter of many of the group's initiatives. Alice believes the efforts and dedication of Rick Pope and Susie Ellis, combined with some timely assistance from Alcoa in helping fund the development of the GIS, has been the making of the project. That assistance has also helped ensure the community and the catchment committee members have ownership of the outcomes.

The future

Susie Ellis maintains the MapInfo GIS one day per week in the Golden Plains Shire office in Linton, collating and updating the local neighbourhood projects and plans.

Susie hopes that many more local farmers and neighbourhood groups will start using the program to build the GIS into a strong and lasting database of information. She hopes the GIS project builds to be another tool farmers will adopt to help them in their farming enterprises.

For more information regarding the Woody Yaloak GIS Project, contact Susie Ellis (Wednesdays) on (03) 5344 7201.

Salvinia threatens Victorian waters



By Lalith Gunasekera

Salvinia (*Salvinia molesta*), also known as giant salvinia or Kariba Weed, is a prolific aquatic fern that has spread from its native habitat in southern Brazil to many other tropical countries around the world, as well as to Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, South Africa and the USA. It ranks second behind water hyacinth (*Eichhorina crassipes*) on the noxious aquatic weed list. It is a State-prohibited weed in Victoria and listed as a weed of national significance.

Terry Bernard from NRE at Wodonga recently discovered fairly large salvinia infestations in three local recreational lakes. The total area of the infestation is approximately one hectare, the largest salvinia infestation ever found in Victoria.

The development of the salvinia plan of attack by the National Weeds Strategy is timely for Victoria. The management plan for the infestation in Wodonga has been implemented and herbicide treatments are in progress. It is going to be an expensive exercise because there is no boat access to the middle of the lake as the infestation is very thick. A 50-tonne hydraulic crane will be used to treat this area.

Salvinia infests a lake at Wodonga.

Mats clog water intakes

Salvinia was first recorded in Australia at Luddenham near Sydney in 1952 and near Brisbane in 1953. It was originally introduced as an aquarium plant.

Giant salvinia grows rapidly to cover the surface of lakes and streams, spreading aggressively by vegetative fragments. It forms floating mats that shade and crowd out important native plants. Thick mats reduce oxygen content and degrade water quality for fish and other aquatic organisms.

Salvinia mats impede boating, fishing and swimming and clog water intakes for irrigation and electrical generation. High rates of transpiration through the leaves during summer can cause up to four times the loss of water from normal water surface evaporation. Heavy infestations of the plant reduce the infiltration of sunlight necessary for photosynthesis in the plant life of creek and river beds. As plant material decomposes it causes water pollution and stagnation through a reduction in water quality.

As well as destroying the food source of waterfowl and semi-aquatic mammals through pollution and prevention of oxygen exchange, a large infestation of salvinia is a physical barrier for aquatic



Salvinia at the initial stage (small), and showing mature, large plants.

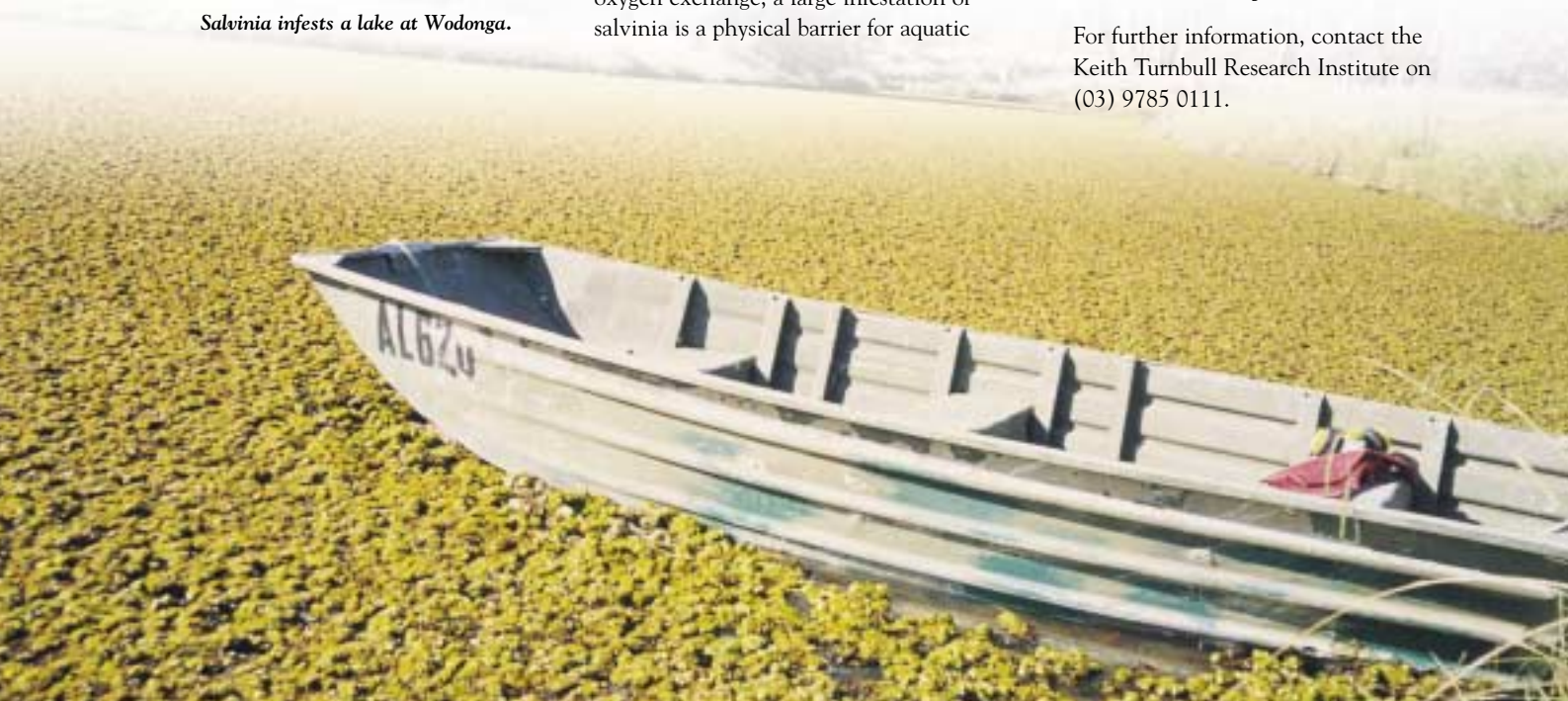
and semi-aquatic animals and may restrict their movement and breeding activities. The native beauty of an open waterbody can be spoilt and further degraded as native aquatic plants, birds and animals are displaced.

Plants can double in size every two days

Salvinia is entirely asexual, which means that it never reproduces from seeds or spores, but only by budding off new plants that are identical to the parent plant. A single pair of leaves is all that is required to begin a new colony. Under ideal conditions – still, warm water with plenty of nutrients – salvinia can double in size every two days until it totally covers the water surface.

There is one registered herbicide for use on salvinia. The most straightforward control is by preventing additional infestations. Biological control will probably be central to any plan for eradication of the plant.

For further information, contact the Keith Turnbull Research Institute on (03) 9785 0111.



IN BRIEF

The new FarmBis

The new FarmBis program, *FarmBis – Skilling Farmers for the Future*, provides grants to subsidise training for farmers, land managers and wild-catch fishers to improve their self-reliance and ability to manage change. Key changes of the new FarmBis include:

- the wild-catch fishing industry now has access to FarmBis support;
- training related to improved natural resource management is a priority;
- property management planning training courses (as previously available via Farm\$mart) are eligible activities; and
- FarmBis is now managed by NRE with the administration of the grants being handled by the Rural Finance Corporation.

For further information on FarmBis call 136 186.

Wimmera Landcare website

One of the first regionally-developed Landcare websites in Victoria is up and running in the Wimmera. The Wimmera Landcare website has hit cyberspace less than six months after the project start date. The website aims to improve community awareness of Landcare issues in the region. It also aims to improve communication between the Wimmera's 60 Landcare groups and between organisations that co-ordinate funding.

The website, www.wca.vic.gov.au/landcare, includes a list of all Wimmera Landcare groups, upcoming events, funding opportunities and links to other websites. It also has pages for tools/downloads, archives, an index and search tools. For further information contact Tony Cuzner on (03) 5382 1544.

Native Grasses Association Conference

The theme of the Native Grasses Association Conference, to be held at Dookie from 27-28 September 2001, is *Our Valuable Native Grasslands, Better Pastures Naturally*.

The conference will be of interest to landholders with existing stands of native grass, or those who wish to develop native pastures, as well as extension officers and consultants and those interested in the use of native grasses for salinity control.

There will be presentations on the role and management of native grasses in agriculture, combining native pasture management for productivity with conservation, biodiversity, ecology and conservation, sustainable agricultural practices and many others. For more information contact Cheryl O'Dwyer at Dookie College on (03) 5833 9200.

Short courses at Dookie College

The University of Melbourne, Dookie College Campus, is running several short courses of interest to land managers and Landcare professionals.

A Habitat Management Short Course will be run from 19 September - 21 November 2001. The course will be run over five sessions which supplement the *Land for Wildlife* program and develop current knowledge and skills in flora and wildlife management.

A free information session and tour on native grasses will be held on 26 September 2001. The tour will assist people in identifying major grass species. Participants can also bring along plants to have them identified.

Both local and interstate experts will talk about native grassland species and their drought tolerance, adaptations to local conditions, productivity and conservation values. For more information contact Aldo Penbrook at Dookie College on (03) 5833 9200.

Centenary of Federation – Living Links Program

The Federation Living Links project features an existing program of planting and growing indigenous trees, shrubs and grasses, to provide community benefit for years to come; an act of confidence in the future and a new century of real community environmental action.

Greening Australia is co-ordinating 20 major sites throughout Victoria from May through to October 2001. The community planting days have attracted over 1000 volunteers who have established over 20,000 indigenous (local native) plants throughout rural and urban Victoria.

The project is being co-ordinated by Greening Australia Victoria in association with Parks Victoria, Conservation Volunteers Australia, NRE, Natural Resources Conservation League, CMAs, local government and local communities. For further information contact Greening Australia Victoria on (03) 9450 5318.

Volunteers at work in Rushworth as part of the Federation Living Links Program.



BushTender Trial –

a new approach to managing native vegetation on private land



There is over a million hectares of native vegetation on private land in Victoria. Much of it is important for salinity control, water quality, land protection and its native flora and fauna value. The management of these areas depends on the already substantial efforts of private landholders supported by various incentive and extension schemes.

The Victorian Government's trial of the new BushTender approach offers payment to landholders in return for the provision of management services that improve the quality or extent of native vegetation on their land.

Landholders in the north-central region between Bendigo and Ballarat and in the north-east between Wangaratta and Wodonga have the opportunity to participate in the three-year BushTender Trial.

A series of public information sessions were held in the trial areas during July to ensure landholders had the best possible

opportunity to understand the BushTender process and how they could participate.

James Todd, BushTender Project Officer at NRE, said the trial is a unique approach to native vegetation management.

"BushTender enables landholders to establish their own price for the management services they are prepared to offer to improve their native vegetation. This price forms the basis for their bid, which is compared with the bids from all other landholders participating in the trial. The successful bids will be those that offer the best value for money."

Successful landholders will receive periodic payments for their services under a management agreement signed with NRE. The agreements in the trial will run for three years.

"All bids will be assessed objectively on the basis of the current conservation value of the site, the amount of service offered and the proposed cost," said James Todd.

The BushTender process

- **Site Assessment.** After landholders in the trial areas register an expression of interest a BushTender field officer arranges a site visit. During the site visit the field officer assesses the significance and quality of the native vegetation and discusses management options with the landholder.
- **Development of Management Plan.** Landholders identify the actions they propose to undertake and, with the field officer, prepare an agreed management plan as the basis for a bid.
- **Submission of Bid.** The landholder submits a sealed bid that nominates the amount of payment being sought by them to undertake the actions in the agreed management plan.
- **Bid Assessment.** All bids are assessed objectively on the basis of the current conservation value of the site, the amount of service offered and cost. Available funds will be allocated on the basis of 'best value for money'.
- **Management Agreements.** Successful bidders are able to sign agreements based on the previously agreed management plan.
- **Reporting and Payments.** Periodic payments and reporting will occur as specified in the agreement.

James Todd said the benefits of the BushTender Trial to landholders include the flexibility to tailor bids to suit individual circumstances and the opportunity to generate a regular and reliable income stream from their native vegetation.

The community benefits include improvement in the quality and extent of native vegetation in the trial areas delivered in a cost-effective manner.

For more information contact the NRE Customer Service Centre on 136 186 or visit the website at www.nre.vic.gov.au under What's New.

Minister for Conservation and Environment, Sherryl Garbutt, and Minister for Agriculture, Keith Hamilton, with VFF President Peter Walsh reviewing the BushTender north-east trial area vegetation map.



Reader Survey

Dear Readers,

After five years and 21 issues of the *Victorian Landcare and Catchment Management* magazine it's time to reflect on what we have achieved and to find out how we can make the magazine even better for the future.

Printing and distributing the magazine is an expensive exercise. We are especially keen to investigate any other cost-effective methods of getting the magazine out to our readers.

Please complete this survey and return it to us in the postage paid envelope enclosed by 19 October 2001.

We will publish the results of the survey in the March 2002 issue.

1. Which of the following best describes you? (tick as many boxes as required)

- ☐ Dryland farmer
- ☐ Irrigation farmer
- ☐ Lifestyle farmer
- ☐ Member of a Landcare or similar group
- ☐ Landcare co-ordinator/facilitator
- ☐ VFF member
- ☐ Resident in a country town
- ☐ City dweller
- ☐ Local government employee or councillor
- ☐ Government officer
- ☐ Catchment Management Authority (CMA) representative
- ☐ Agribusiness person
- ☐ Landcare sponsor

By returning your reader survey form you'll have a chance to win one of these great prizes:

A Nokia 8250 mobile phone. This small and lightweight phone has enhanced visual clarity, phonebook, send/receive SMS and SMS chat1, internal vibration and an ergonomically designed keypad for easier dialling and management. The Nokia 8250 allows you to personalise your phone settings with the downloadable profiles, screensavers and ringing tones. It has a built-in SMS chat feature with chat history and fast reply.

A Treemax Plant Protection System for the toughest sites consisting of 100 Treemax heavy-duty plastic tree guards, 300 hardwood stakes and 100 Jutemat weed mats. Treemax heavy-duty guards with sturdy hardwood stakes will protect young trees from grazing vermin and the elements for 36 months, while the Jutemat will stop weed competition for 6-18 months (depending on the site conditions) giving your plants a genuine head start.

500 Treemax MilkGuards with 1000 bamboo stakes.

Completely degradable, the Treemax MilkGuards are the budget guard for large-scale plantings, giving seedlings a head start in their first year.



2. On a personal interest basis, rate the different types of stories in *Victorian Landcare and Catchment Management*.

	very interested	quite interested	not very interested	not at all interested
News from Landcare groups and networks	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Individual farmer case studies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
New research findings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
News from NRE, the VFF and the CMAs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Practical stories on how to do something	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Information about grants and incentives	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reviews of new publications	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



3. Which of the following publications do you receive or buy?

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Local Landcare group newsletter | <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Weekly Times</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Regional Landcare group or network newsletter | <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Stock and Land</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Australian Landcare Magazine</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> Local paper |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Network</i> (Rural Womens Network magazine) | |

4. If we could dramatically increase the circulation of the magazine by distributing it with a major rural newspaper would you be prepared to purchase it for a small cost (around \$2.00 per issue)?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

5. Would you read the magazine on the Internet?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

6. Do other people read your copy of the magazine?

- ☐ No ☐ Yes ☐ family members ☐ Yes ☐ non-family members

7. How do you receive *Victorian Landcare and Catchment Management*?

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mailed from Melbourne in a plastic cover | <input type="checkbox"/> Mailed from local NRE or CMA office |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Through your Landcare group or network | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) _____ |

Do you want to stay on the mailing list?

- ☐ Yes (please update address details if required) ☐ No

8. Are there any ways the magazine could be improved for you, or any issues you would like to see covered in upcoming issues? If yes, please explain.



Junior Landcare

Millewa students perform for a tiny bird and its home



Students from Werrimuil P-12 School captivate the audience with their play about the White-browed Treecreeper.

The title of the night was gobsmacking – The Basic Instinct Information Night Featuring the Inseparable Relationship Between the White-browed Treecreeper and the Belah Woodlands – but over 130 people came along and all left with a new understanding of the tenuous existence of one of the Millewa's small birds.

The night was organised by the Northern Mallee Landcare Network to draw attention to the charming, endangered, but little-studied bird, the White-browed Treecreeper. The survival of the Treecreeper is dependent on the regeneration and restoration of the threatened Belah Woodlands.

The information night targeted local landowners and Landcare group members with the aim of heightening their interest in the bird and giving them guidelines for restoring the fragile Belah woodland communities.

Members of the Millewa Carwarp and Yelta Landcare groups listened attentively to a great range of speakers. Lindsay Cupper created a moving impression reciting a poem of the Millewa. Jim Radford and Kate Callister provided a scientific perspective by sharing their PhD research on the Treecreeper and the woodlands. But it was the Werrimuil P-12 School and the Lake Primary School that really wowed the audience.

The students put on a feast of singing, dancing and acting to get the important message across.

Here are some of the childrens' reflections on the night:

"In the play I was Mick Dundee Treecreeper. I had to show Bruce and Cheryl Treecreeper around 'High Brow Heights' – an ideal place for them to live."
Luke Teasdale, year four.

"I thought our play went great. The most interesting part, I thought, was when Dame Edna Treecreeper talked in a very shrill voice. I'm sure everyone liked the basic instinct night, including the performers."
Tegan Rankin, year four.

"I didn't know about the Treecreepers before (the play) but now I know all about them. I also learned how to take care of the environment. It's a good idea to plant trees because lizards like warm sunny places. I enjoyed my part in the play. Especially making people laugh."
Jarrod Dodd, year four.

"On the Treecreeper night I learnt a lot. First of all I learnt what sort of trees they live in and how much acreage they like and how there are different sorts of species."
Toby Magee, year five.

"On our farm our family are going to plant some belah trees for the White-browed Treecreepers so people can't cut their homes down." Chelsea Fox, year four.



Sing a song of Landcare: Students from Lake Primary School harmonise on behalf of the threatened Belah Woodlands.

"On Saturday I went to the Yarrara Forest to look for some White-browed Treecreepers. I looked all through the forest then I saw one. It was amazing to see the babies in the nest. The birdman (Jim Radford) found a nest. It had twigs and berries in it."
Emily Wright, year four.

Matt Crawley, facilitator of the Northern Mallee Landcare Network, said the evening has already produced an increased interest in the Bushcare Project at Yarrara Ridge. A follow-up field day was well attended and more get-togethers are planned.

"Thanks to the all speakers, and especially the school students, the basic instinct night had proved a great way of kick-starting community interest in this important project, said Matt.



Natural Heritage Trust

Helping Communities
Helping Australia

A Federal Government Initiative

Victorian repair works in the Murray-Darling – a snapshot

Victoria's section of the Murray-Darling Basin includes regions as diverse as the river towns of Swan Hill and Echuca, the Mallee district of Wimmera and the Victorian high country of Omeo.

Through Murray-Darling 2001, the Natural Heritage Trust has contributed \$66.7 million to Victoria for 240 projects, including the development of regional dryland salinity, revegetation and nutrient management.

Floodplain management strategies have been completed for the Wimmera, Mallee and north-central regions.

The Goulburn-Broken and north-east regions have undertaken major river restoration works, with more than 120 kilometres of waterways fenced-off and 176,000 seedlings planted along river and creek banks.

The Trust provided \$685,000 in funding for wastewater treatment upgrades and reuse schemes in Shepparton, Wangaratta, Myrtleford, Lake Boga and Mooroopna.

To tackle salinity problems, Trust funding has helped Victorian communities drain 52,000 hectares to control rising groundwater tables, plant 85,000 hectares of vegetation in recharge areas and sow 102,000 hectares of perennial crops to reduce watertables.

SECURING THE FUTURE

From toxic soup to healthy

Letting fertilizer run down the drain is like pouring petrol into the gutter instead of your car. It costs money – and it has a dramatic effect on the environment.

This is the message the Nutrients in Drains project has been bringing to farmers, with \$60,000 as part of \$370,000 in Natural Heritage Trust funding for the Goulburn-Broken Regional Waterwatch Program since 1997.

"After years of hard work the message is getting through," said David Hodgkins, Waterwatch Regional Facilitator.

"While farmers save money on phosphorous fertilizers, the community benefits from cleaner water.

"Nutrients in waterways can lead to blue-green algae bloom, which makes water unfit for drinking, agriculture and recreation," said David.

"Studies found that these nutrients came from dryland sources, wastewater treatment plants, urban stormwater,

irrigated agriculture and intensive agriculture. The largest percentage came from irrigated agriculture.

"Sometimes our farmers fertilized their paddocks without taking the weather into account. If it rained soon after applying the fertilizer, it would flow from their paddocks into our waterways – increasing the nutrient load in our rivers and enhancing the possibility of algal blooms.

Goulburn-Broken Waterwatch implements the Nutrients in Irrigation Drains Initiative in conjunction with the Goulburn-Murray Landcare Network and Goulburn-Murray Water. It was established in 1995 after the catchment was outlined as Victoria's highest priority for nutrient reduction in the Murray-Darling Basin Commission Algae Management Strategy.

"We knew that the community would find it hard to relate to a whole bunch of numbers on the quality of their water, so we came up with the idea of measuring the damage in bags of fertilizer," said David.

Doug Brown monitors phosphorous in the irrigation drainwater leaving his farm.



RE OF THE MURRAY-DARLING

waterway



These dummy bags of superphosphate illustrate the loss of nutrients from farms. A waste of money for the farmer and a serious threat to the environment.

"We were able to report to the community that there were a certain number of bags of fertilizer being wasted on any one day and that there are things we can do to stop that happening.

"The initiative, as part of the overall catchment water quality strategy, has been very successful, with farmers using more proactive approaches to water quality such as pumping nutrients back into paddocks."

He stresses that farmers are not the only ones who can help. Increased phosphorous levels can also result from urban areas if detergent, lawn fertilizer and litter are allowed to go down the drain.

"Australia's reputation for being clean and green is very important to our export market, if this is taken away, our exports will suffer," he says. "But it is looking bright for the future. Farmers and communities together with governments and agencies are all working to help keep Australia's 'clean and green' reputation alive."

For further information contact David Hodgkins on (03) 5832 0460.

Traditional owners rehabilitate the Murray

Thousands of new plants are helping stabilise eroded banks of the Murray River near Robinvale in Victoria, thanks to \$30,000 in assistance from the Federal Government's Natural Heritage Trust.

The Robinvale Murray River CDEP, an Aboriginal organisation which employs 92 Aboriginal people, has an ongoing contract with the Natural Heritage Trust to do extensive works at the rifle range near the town.

The area's problems include soil erosion, rubbish dumping and vandalism.

It contains many midden sites (shell left from the cooking fires of past generations) that have a historical importance to the indigenous people of the area.

Project Officer Richie Kennedy said it was of utmost importance that these sites be protected.

"The land along the river holds a deep and spiritual meaning to the Aboriginal people of the area as it contains the past memories of our previous generations and

provides us with the strength to continue in our battle for equality," he said.

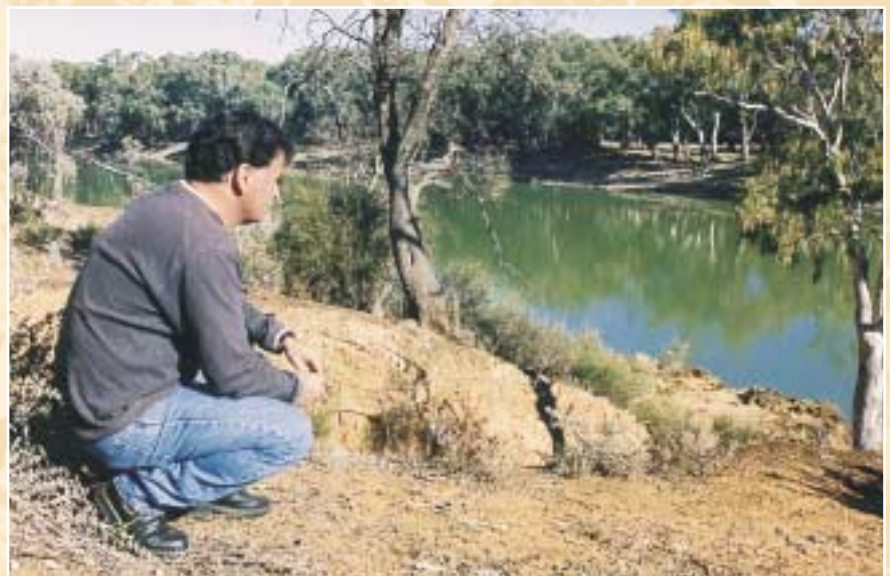
"Financial assistance from the Natural Heritage Trust and labour supplied by the CDEP has enabled this important project to continue."

Richie and five of his fellow employees are involved in the care and rehabilitation of the site and will continue in their efforts to upgrade it back to its original state.

Work done on the area includes planting thousands of trees, fencing and clearing up rubbish that has littered the region for several years.

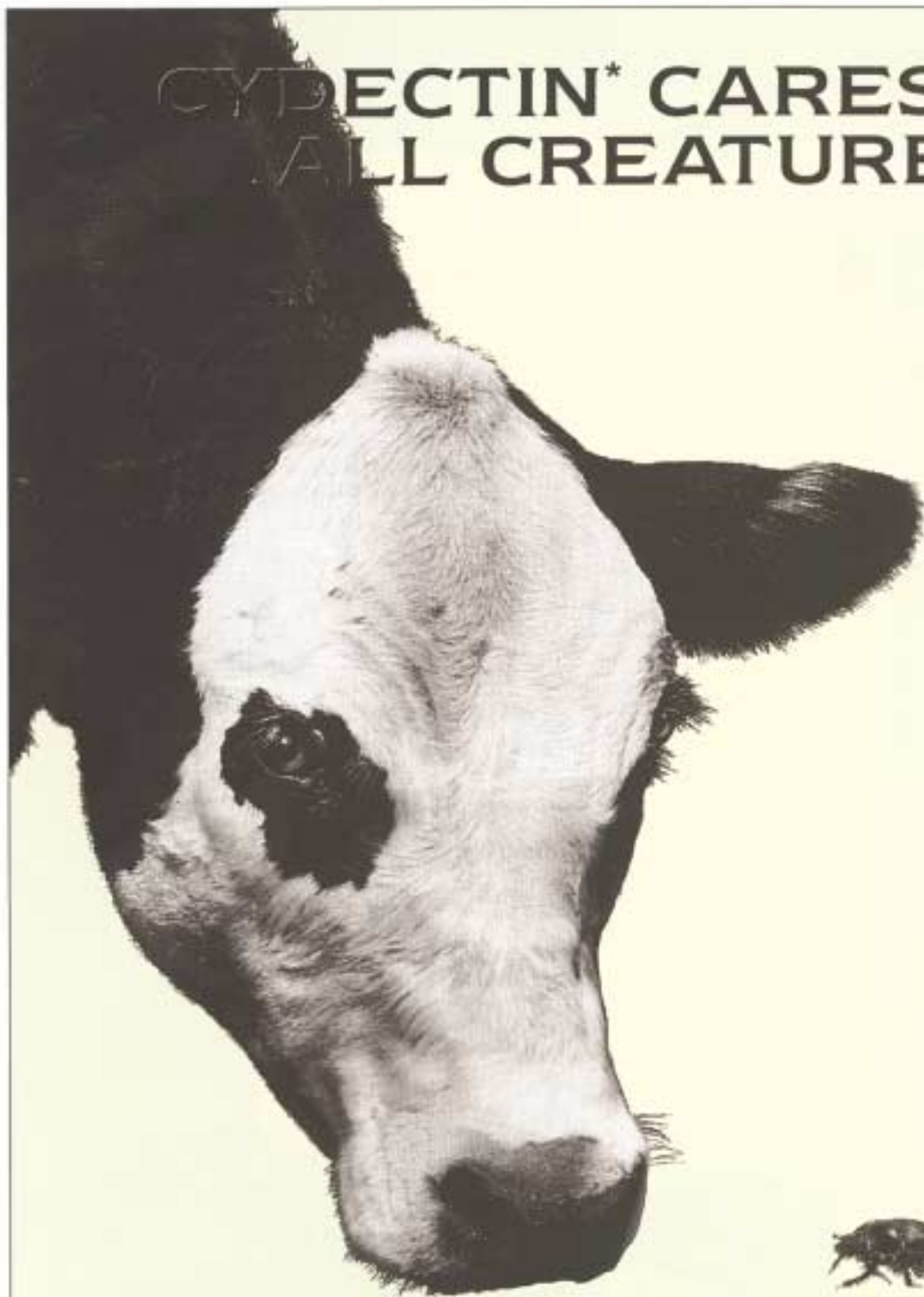
"The Aboriginal people of Robinvale have experienced great satisfaction and pride in what they are achieving and, if given the opportunity to show their capabilities, can make a significant difference in the restoration of our native country," Richie said.

"We've put fencing up to keep trail bikes out because they really cause a problem, churning up the earth and causing erosion along the gullies," he said.



Rifle Range Forest Rehabilitation Project Officer, Richard Kennedy, with Aboriginal middens beside the Murray River near Robinvale.

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