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# L *Victorian* Landcare

& CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT

Whole farm planning  
in the north-east

The saving of Swan Bay

A first for Rabbit Free!

## Editorial contributions

Carrie Tiffany, Tiffany and Associates  
1 Lane Street, Blackburn North 3130  
Phone 9894 2169  
Fax 9894 2515  
E-mail: ctiffany@relax.com.au

## Mailing list enquiries

Brenan Wotherspoon, Victorian Farmers  
Federation, Phone 9207 5527  
Fax 9207 5500  
E-mail: bwotherspoon@vff.org.au

## Advertising

Paul Crock  
Phone 0418 377 264 Fax 9428 4676

## Cover photograph:

Border Collie pup at Rokewood  
by Paul Crock.

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# CONTENTS



Something for everyone in the Mallee

◀ 6



Charles Mason's war against rabbits

◀ 10-11



EMS explained

◀ 14-15



Planning not plodding!

◀ 20-21

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## From the editors

Every two years we celebrate the unsung heroes and heroines of Australia. By the time you receive your copy of this issue Australia's National Landcare Award winners will have been announced. Here's hoping that there are some Victorian Landcarers amongst the winners.

We'll provide some follow-up on the awards in the next issue.

### 2003 National Landcare Conference

Need an excuse to visit the top end? The next National Landcare Conference is being held in Darwin from 28 April to 1 May 2003.

The theme of the conference is *Respecting Values – Working and Learning Together*. It will provide an important opportunity for information sharing, discussion and debate on the wide range of Landcare issues facing us today in our ever-changing social, environmental and economic climate.

Preparations are well underway and a call for papers has recently gone out. Speakers who are capable of delivering dynamic, thought provoking presentations that will encourage audience participation are being sought. The conference format will include presented papers, posters, discussion groups, panels and audiovisual displays.

Up-to-date information can be obtained from the conference website at [www.landcareconference.nt.gov.au](http://www.landcareconference.nt.gov.au) or from the conference secretariat on (08) 8941 0388.

We encourage our readers to consider attending the conference. It will be a great opportunity to network and share ideas and to see a really stunning part of the country.

### Review of Regional Catchment Strategies

Victoria's Regional Catchment Strategies set the framework for State and Commonwealth government investment for natural resource management outcomes.

The Regional Catchment Strategy review provides the Landcare community with an opportunity to have input into the future directions and priorities for natural resource management in each region.

If you have an opinion or vision for natural resource management, in particular Landcare, we strongly encourage you to involve yourself in the process and provide comments and suggestions to your relevant CMA.

Mark Costello, Lyall Grey  
and Carrie Tiffany

# Lively spring for 444,000 tree-planters

The 444,000 Trees Project is set for a huge final year with over 92,000 seedlings and 35,000 direct-seeded trees set to be planted at 88 sites this coming spring.

According to co-ordinator Karen Wales, this is almost double what was planted during 2001.

"It is a huge task but we are determined to meet our target of fostering 444,000 trees in the Moyne and lower Hopkins River catchment areas within the three years of the project period," she said.

The Hopkins Moyne Land Management Group is involving natural resource management students from South West TAFE in further developing and delivering the Kids Caring for Catchments program in local schools. This program includes classroom discussion on the need for indigenous vegetation plus hands-on planting at the project sites.

"Kids who have participated in previous years are also keen to revisit past plantings and see how their plants have gone. There is a real sense of concern and ownership in the students," Karen Wales said.

## ***Volunteer planters needed***

Two Community Planting Days have also been scheduled for 21 September and 13 October 2002, with a concerted campaign to attract as many volunteer planters as possible.

The final result from the three years of the project will be 186 landholders establishing 204 hectares of locally indigenous trees and understorey using a combination of 201,900 seedlings and 69 kilograms of seed. This equates to around 475,900 new plants and the protection of many remnants.

For further information contact Karen Wales on 5560 7354.

*Left: A happy young planter braves muddy conditions at a Community Planting Day last year.*

*Below: Volunteers sort seedlings on a degraded riverbank.*



# REGIONAL CATCHMENT STRATEGIES –

*time to reflect and renew*



*By Vera Lubczenko*

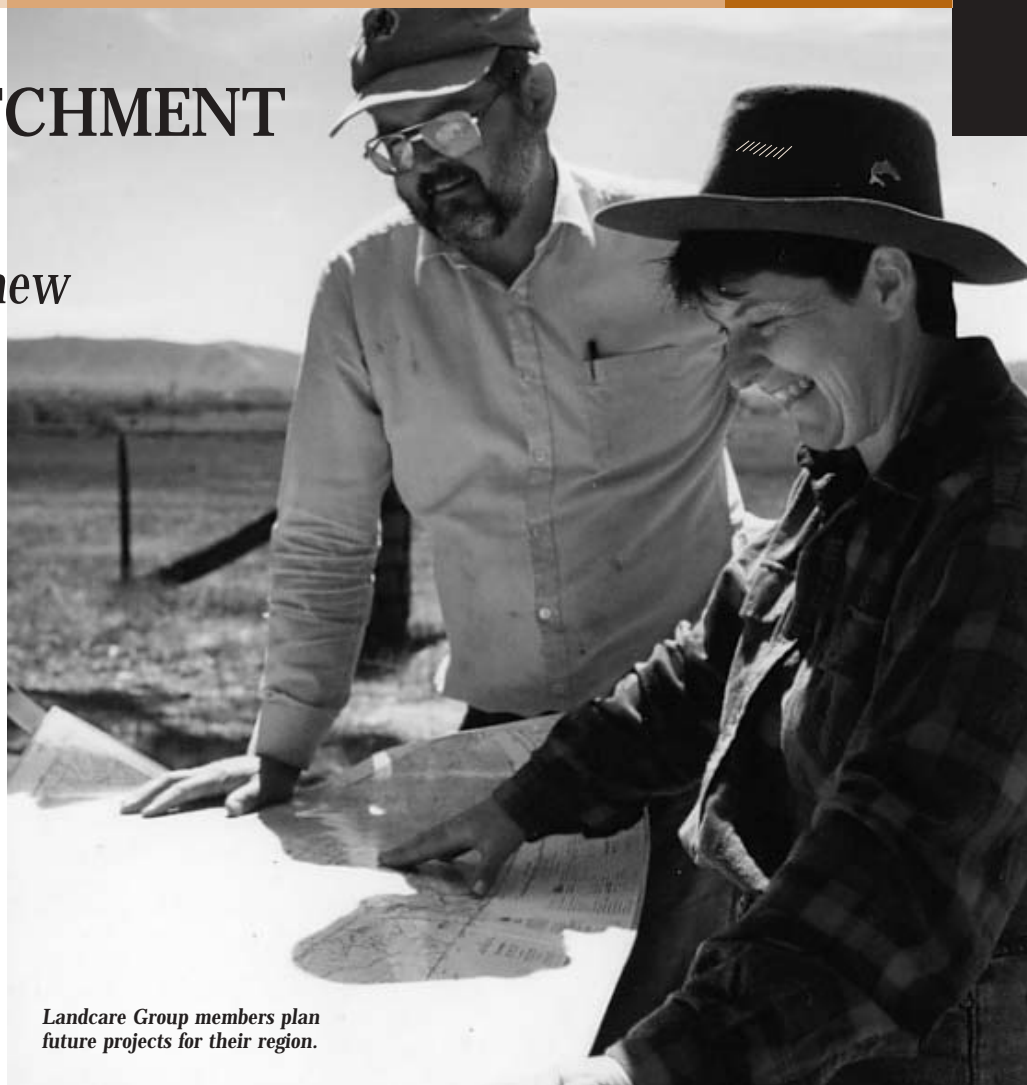
How do we get the community, the regions and government around the table agreeing to natural resource management priorities? How should we be investing in these priorities over the next five years? The Regional Catchment Strategies currently being developed by nine Victorian CMAs and the Port Phillip and Western Port Catchment and Land Protection Board provide a terrific starting point.

The first Victorian Regional Catchment Strategies were developed in 1997. They were recognised as pioneering documents, in that they were the first catchment-based integrated strategies produced for a whole state anywhere in Australia.

This year, a new round of strategies is being developed by the CMAs and their regional communities to cover the period 2002-2007. The unique feature of the Regional Catchment Strategies is that they capture the community's aspirations for natural resources management. Each strategy is owned by the community in which it was developed.

Each region has its own approach to the development of its strategy. For example, in the north central region ensuring close links with local government has been recognised as a key to achieving integrated natural resource management. The North Central CMA has utilised an existing local government forum that incorporates 16 municipal councils to gain a comprehensive and co-ordinated local government input into their strategy.

The north central region is also home to ten indigenous communities. In recognition of the unique way that indigenous groups relate to natural resources, special effort is



*Landcare Group members plan future projects for their region.*

being made to ensure their genuine participation and inclusion in the development of the strategy.

An integrated natural resource management forum has been established across east and west Gippsland representing more than 60 agencies. The forum is bringing together all of the major stakeholders to discuss the wide range of natural resource management issues throughout Gippsland. This model and approach is being closely looked at by other regions as an effective way of getting all the key players around the table.

The Corangamite CMA has seized the strategy development phase as a fantastic opportunity to develop community engagement tools for the region. They have facilitated detailed planning, brokered partnerships, educated and made people more aware of the issues and relished the chance to get comprehensive feedback from a range of stakeholders. The many workshops held in Corangamite over the last six months have enabled

discussion and assisted in setting regional goals and a 20-year direction.

The breadth of Regional Catchment Strategy activity across the State is staggering and this is just the first part of the journey. Over the next five years there will be many actions delivered to ensure better natural resource management outcomes are delivered.

Each region's draft Regional Catchment Strategy has a public consultation phase. The Goulburn Broken and Glenelg Hopkins regions are now entering into their public consultation phases, with Corangamite, Wimmera, North Central and Mallee to follow suit over the next few months. Look out for Port Phillip and Western Port, North East and West and East Gippsland's draft strategies during early 2003.

For more information contact your CMA or NRE Regional Catchment Strategy Co-ordinator, Vera Lubczenko, on 9412 4268.

# Something for everyone – a Mallee extravaganza



*By Matt Crawley*

A marquee full of Landcare representatives jumping up and down to the beat of a local bush band is not the usual way to evaluate the success of a Landcare conference, but this was no usual conference.

With the theme of *Something for everyone*, the Mallee Regional Landcare Network treated the 120 participants to just about every theme and issue that could possibly be included into the two-day extravaganza – plus a bit of dancing on the side!

The program provided an interactive, diverse and informative conference on land management in the Mallee. The key features were an address from Professor Peter Cullen, 2001 Environmentalist of the Year and Chief Executive of the Cooperative Research Centre for Freshwater Ecology; Mark Costello, State Landcare Co-ordinator, speaking on state and national issues; a panel information session on the Regional Catchment Strategy; a choice of three field tours on regent parrot habitat, sustainable agriculture and the mineral sands industry; three revolving sessions on biodiversity, salinity and sustainable farming; a special Junior Landcare session for schools, teachers and parents; and four concurrent sessions on rural finance, bio-regional planning, corecycle on farms and irrigated Landcare.

While the conference incorporated sessions on traditional natural resource management issues it also catered for opportunities for new and innovative Landcare initiatives. Presentations and displays on Junior Landcare, indigenous cultural awareness, interpretation, and on-farm recycling provided an insight that Landcare truly can be anything a group wants it to be.

The result was a conference that brought together dryland and irrigation landholders, government organisations, utilities, schools, industries and all other land managers under the one Landcare banner.

The conference organising committee had one other target to meet – that every delegate must have fun. We wanted to re-establish the connection with Landcare and having a good time. Landcare is about

dealing with all the issues that affect our natural resources and because of the nature of this, it can be very demanding. So along with the education and awareness, a dinner and dance and numerous fun moments helped to bring the fun aspect back into the serious world of land management.

No conference is complete without the donation of financial and in-kind support. The Mallee Regional Landcare Network would like to acknowledge the contributions of the Natural Heritage Trust, Lindemans Wines, Mildara Wines, Mallee CMA and NRE.

Finally a big thank you to every Landcare member, executive and group that supported the conference and who will always be the true beating heart of Landcare in the region.

*The band whipped up a frenzy of dancing.*

*The Landcare hands set the scene for the conference – everyone was welcome and included.*



# Don and Jan Jowett – Victoria's top tree growers

By Gayl Morrow

In a first for Australia, the Victorian Farmers Federation has joined with the national private forestry organisation, Australian Forest Growers, to present the Victorian Tree Farmer of the Year Award. This year's winners are Don and Jan Jowett from Hamilton.

The award was hotly contested. Frank and Sharon Hirst from Ranceby in South Gippsland were runners-up for their ground-breaking example of integrated sawlog production on difficult, steep slopes.

Andrew Lang from Lismore in western Victoria received third place for his exceptional commitment and enthusiasm for the development of Sugar Gum as a plantation species.

The Jowetts impressed the judges with their highly innovative approach to developing their farm forestry system with their prime lamb enterprise. Over 80% of the property is under some type of tree crop. The initial impetus for developing farm forestry systems came in 1987 when 50,000 sheep died within a 50-kilometre radius of their home property due to lack of shelter.

Since that time Don and Jan have experimented with almost any combination of tree and silvicultural management regime possible to ensure the production of the highest quality timber without adversely affecting pasture growth or prime lamb production.

The expansion of the Blue Gum industry allowed Don and Jan to expand their tree growing enterprise to two other farm forestry properties where they have entered into contractual agreements for the production of pulp.

All of their trees are managed for multiple use, whether that is shelter, wildlife and amenity value on the home property, or resting and rehabilitation of agricultural land by the removal of stock, or the regeneration of degraded native vegetation and the building of nutrients and organic matter under Blue Gum crops.

Don Jowett said they are not just planting for a dollar return in 20-30 years time, but for the immediate benefits to our whole farming life – social, economic and environmental.

“The farm has become a pleasure to work on. The soils are more friable, with far more earthworms. The trees provide a home for natural predators – insect pests of pasture have largely disappeared. They offer a haven for our sheep. I can put our off-shears and lambing ewes in any paddock at any time of the year and not have to worry about them being affected by the weather.”

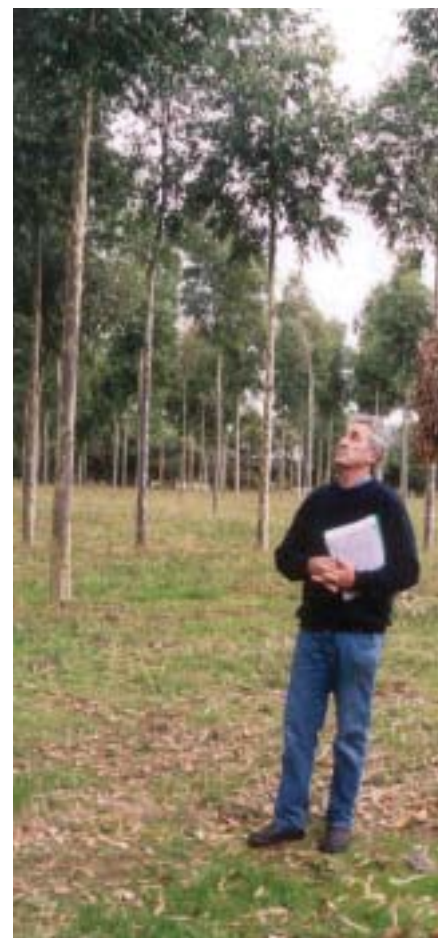
The judges were impressed with the teamwork between Don and Jan. Their detailed knowledge of a wide range of species (including the management of remnant vegetation) over the last decade and up-to-date management of the working system was considered exceptional. The planning and development of market linkages was also highly praised.

According to Don Jowett the environmental benefits of tree planting are immeasurable.

“Particularly noticeable are the improvements to downstream health and water quality. There's a far greater diversity of native animal life.

“As for the economic aspect, the shelter benefits mean lambing yields are up by 15-20%. And even though 30% of the farm is now under trees, we're still running 650 ewes – the same number as when we started out and the farm had no trees.”

The Jowetts will fly to Albany, Western Australia later this year to the Australian Forest Grower Conference where they will represent Victoria and compete for the National Tree Grower Award.



*Don Jowett in his Spotted Gum plantation.*



# RABBIT FREE! – a land

In a first for Victoria, two areas of public land in central Victoria have now been declared Rabbit Free!

A large part of the Mt Hooghly State Forest, the Wiseman's Hill Bushland Reserve and three neighbouring farms were recently presented with Rabbit Free! accreditation by NRE. The properties, in the Black Ranges near Maryborough, all had a history of severe rabbit infestation.

Rabbit Free! is a joint initiative by NRE and Rotary International, to formally recognise the efforts of landowners to rid their land of rabbits. The accreditation scheme has been in place for almost two years, but this is the first time that public land has been given Rabbit Free! status.

To qualify for Rabbit Free! accreditation land managers must have demonstrated a positive, determined and persistent approach to integrated rabbit control on their land for at least the past three years, now, and in the future. Rabbit Free! assessors look for visible signs of rabbits on the land, including warrens, scratchings and dung hills.

## ***Vigilance needed – despite calicivirus***

Brian Dowley, NRE's Pest Animal Program Leader for the north-west region, said that although the rabbit calicivirus has dramatically reduced rabbit numbers in many areas, landholders should continue their control efforts.

"Long-term control depends on the removal of rabbit harbour, reducing the potential for rabbits to build up their numbers again. Rabbit Free! could be described as zero tolerance to rabbits. It recognises commitment to rabbit management," he said.

NRE Forest Management Officer, Paul Bates, said that rabbit control in the forest was a big challenge and involved three years of consistent work to achieve long-term control.

"There were rabbit warrens in the gullies and on steeply sloping ground and the understorey is quite thick in some of the box ironbark forest. At the start we used big machinery to rip the warrens and followed up with hand tools in the reinfested areas."

Parks Victoria Ranger, Rob Brouwers, agreed that after the initial ripping of warrens in the Wiseman's Hill Bushland Reserve, persistence, monitoring and follow-up works were very important to ensure the continuing success of the rabbit control project.

## ***Group approach pays-off***

Two Landcare groups, Timor West and Natte Yallock, were involved in the group rabbit control program in the Black Ranges. Three properties, owned by Landcare members Alex and June Wiseman, Robert and Glen Ipsen and Don Mortlock, have achieved Rabbit Free! accreditation. The Ipsen's 200-hectare Rathscar property adjoins the Wiseman's Hill Bushland Reserve.



*Paul Bates installing a Rabbit Free! sign.*

# management partnership

By Jill Frederick

Robert Ipsen said that in the past a rabbit-baiting program was carried out religiously every year.

“The annual baiting programs didn’t work because not everyone participated,” he said.

“With a co-ordinated group approach, involving both the Landcare groups and the public land managers, we were able to achieve long-term control.

“Most of my hills were chisel-seeded with perennial pasture species about 15 years ago, but this failed because of the rabbits. Now I have grass growing in gullies which were once barren and our recent work to establish perennial pastures has been a success. I attribute our recent success largely to the rabbit control. The incorporation of lime, to improve soil structure, has also helped,” Robert Ipsen said.

## Five-year plan for north-central

The Timor West and Natte Yallock Landcare groups are in rabbit-prone sedimentary hill country – NRE’s top priority zone for action on rabbit management in the north-central region. Priorities for rabbit management have been clearly defined in a five-year Rabbit Management Action Plan 2000-2005.



Paul Bates, Robert Ipsen, Joe Helper, Don Mortlock, Alex Wiseman and Rob Brouwers celebrate the Rabbit Free! accreditation.

Building a rabbit-free culture is the action plan’s key objective and NRE is committed to providing support for community groups, which play a vital role in the pursuit of this. Although every landholder bears the responsibility for rabbit control on his or her own land, long-term control can’t be achieved unless most of the community in an area is actively involved.

Long-term control of rabbits is possible where land managers adopt and continually apply the principles of

integrated rabbit control. Integrated rabbit control is the combination of two or more proven methods of rabbit control used together. Proven methods include:

- ripping of warrens;
- fumigation;
- removal of harbour (blackberries, gorse, bracken, etc.);
- poisoning;
- use of exclusion fencing; and
- shooting (when numbers are low).



If you believe that you can demonstrate a positive, determined and persistent approach to rabbit control and wish to have your property assessed for Rabbit Free! accreditation, complete this form and post it (no stamp required) to:

**RABBIT FREE!**

Free Post Reply Paid 9

Department of Natural Resources and Environment,  
PO Box 120  
St. Arnaud VIC 3478

I, \_\_\_\_\_ wish  
to have my property assessed for RABBIT FREE!

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Town/Suburb \_\_\_\_\_ Postcode \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone number: \_\_\_\_\_





# Charles Mason's life-long



Photograph courtesy of The Border Mail.

*From left, Charles Mason and Greg Johnson in front of the steep hills that have been a rabbit haven for many years. The bare patch on the hill has been recently ripped by the bulldozer.*

Charles Mason is committed to ridding his steep 460-acre Everton hill country property of rabbits. It runs in the family. In the 1930s Charles' father paid a swaggy a pound a week to dig the burrows that pockmarked the hills. The man worked hard – digging burrows, dogging and installing netting. For a while the hills were clear but the rabbits came back – even worse than before.

In the 1950s the chance to reduce the numbers came again. The release of Myxomatosis decimated rabbits and Charles was pleased to see the erosion on the hills start to repair.

It seemed like the problem was solved but over time immunity to the disease increased and numbers climbed.

Charles says he has been trying to control the rabbits for over 50 years.

“After I left school I used to work with my father digging up burrows. It was backbreaking work. The hills are almost too steep to walk on, let alone work on. With a concerted effort we could reduce the numbers for a few seasons, but they always came back.

“Over the years I've used just about every technique possible – digging

burrows, using explosives, ripping, spotlighting and laying 1080 baits.”

In 1996 a new opportunity to do something permanent about rabbits came along. NRE announced the Rabbit Buster Program with the aim of capitalising on the release of rabbit calicivirus.

Rabbit Buster promotes an integrated group approach to rabbit control, in particular, warren distraction and harbour removal – but with the added extra of co-ordination with neighbours and Landcare group members.

# war against rabbits

By Greg Johnson



Charles Mason and the members of the Hodgson and Horseshoe and Burgoogee Creeks Landcare groups were keen to take up the challenge.

Local farmer Ron Briggs was appointed as the Rabbit Buster Facilitator. Ron worked hard to get all of the local landholders involved in the program. He did a lot of legwork during the poisoning programs and co-ordinated the work of excavators and bulldozers. Ron and the landholders marked every burrow with pink flags and made sure the machinery got up the steepest terrain.

Rabbit Buster provided 50% of the funding for the dozer and excavator work and harbour removal, such as blackberry, furze and bracken fern.

Charles Mason says the program has been a huge success. He is confident that there is not one rabbit or burrow remaining on his property. The property is the first in the area to be declared Rabbit Free!

The before and after photographs of Charles' property show how removing rabbits can improve the health of the wider environment.

**Before: The early 1990s – a rabbit infested, weed prone and unhealthy landscape.**



**After: June 2002 – well grassed with native perennials and Rabbit Free!**



By improving the largely native perennial grass cover on the hills biodiversity is enriched, runoff infiltration and erosion are lessened and soil health, water quality and salinity levels are improved.

Charles says the timing of the program was crucial.

“It makes sense to put the effort in to taking the numbers from low to zero. It is much harder to have an impact when the numbers are very high. I'd encourage all landholders to take advantage of the opportunity calicivirus has offered us.”

Charles Mason is committed to retaining the Rabbit Free! status of the property. Although at 73 he admits he isn't getting any younger. He has recently put in some new tracks around the hill so if the rabbits make a comeback he'll find it easier to get up and on to them quickly.



Photograph courtesy of The Border Mail.

**Rabbit Free! at last – Charles Mason (left) and Greg Johnson in front of the new sign.**



# Saving Swan Bay – community

Without community awareness and participation the Swan Bay Integrated Catchment Project would not be as far advanced as it is. The small closed catchment of Swan Bay is home to over 100 farming families. It is ringed by the growing coastal townships of Drysdale, Wallington, Portarlinton, St Leonards, Point Lonsdale and Queenscliff.

The committee of the catchment project has a wide variety of audiences to communicate with. According to the group's catchment officer, Steve Smithyman, the main thrust of the communications strategy has been

to develop a close relationship with local media outlets.

In the last year alone over 50 media articles\* and advertisements were printed to promote the group's activities in local newsletters and newspapers.

"The issues covered in the stories are always changing," Steve said.

"We have looked at weed identification, conservation of remnant vegetation, waterway and wetland protection, dune restoration, whole farm planning, bio-control of weeds, Waterwatch and Hooded Plover and Orange-bellied Parrot conservation and habitat protection.

"We regularly set up information displays in as many as 19 different locations, including schools shopping centres and local nurseries," Steve said.

"We have run workshops, information stalls, catchment bus tours and a whole farm planning course."

## **Schools – the key to the future**

Catchment Facilitator, Sue Longmore, believes the key to educating the community is to start with the young. The group has organised over 40 community awareness-raising activities with local catchment schools.

"Our school program includes teaching the kids about a host of topics from biological control of pest plants, ecology of Swan Bay, stormwater and litter and where it ends up, as well as rural waterway issues," Sue said.

"The children monitor four sites as part of the Waterwatch program and have helped with revegetation projects using plants propagated in their own school nurseries," she said.

Sue said the schools have developed a much better understanding of their local environment. She explained they had completed the restoration of coastal dune systems through brushmatting, weed control and revegetation.

"Involving the kids in projects such as the Bellarine Secondary College students' breeding and strategic release of the biological control agents, Bridal Creeper Leafhopper and Gorse Spider-mite have been a real hit. Not only are they learning quite technical biology, but they can follow through and see the results."

Sue said the Gorse Spider-mite project was a great success with the mite naturally spreading up to 15 kilometres from its release site.

Another school project that has proven to be very popular has been the stencilling of stormwater drains in Ocean Grove, Point Lonsdale and Queenscliff.

*Looking from the top of the Swan Bay catchment across Swan Bay, Queenscliff and to the Port Phillip Heads.*

# awareness is the key

By Paul Crock



## **Opening communications**

Increased interaction between local environment groups has fostered a sharing of interests and skills. Steve Smithyman said that as more and more projects are completed, groups and individuals are beginning to see the benefits of their efforts.

“We have succeeded in strengthening ties between groups and helped to identify where each group’s efforts link in to the catchment plan. By bringing the groups together we have been able to demonstrate a clear vision for our local area.

“Through this combined effort, and the catchment plan, we have been able to attract and maintain involvement from all ranges of funding bodies,” Steve said.

He explained that the Myer Foundation enabled the fencing of Salt Lake Three to protect it from stock grazing. Parks Victoria funded more than 12,000 indigenous plants to be grown by local volunteers, 3000 of which were planted on the foreshores of Lake Victoria, Reserve #1, Freshwater Lagoon, Edwards Point and the western foreshore of Swan Bay and Mud Islands.

## **On-ground achievements**

Strong support from the Natural Heritage Trust, Corangamite CMA, Myer Foundation, Coast Action/Coastcare, Parks Victoria and Alcoa of Australia

has helped the group achieve some impressive milestones in their plan.

Last year 4.1 kilometres of waterways were fenced and revegetated, 1.7 km of wildlife corridors stimulated, 13 hectares of remnant vegetation protected from grazing of stock and 32 hectares revegetated with indigenous vegetation using around 73,000 indigenous plants.

“We have a strong relationship with our funding partners and it is hoped their on-going support for our on-ground works will enable the linking of existing nodes of remnant vegetation and more waterway protection works,” Sue Longmore said.

“We have encouraged neighbouring landholders to work together to identify the landscape that they want into the future, and worked to link projects across property boundaries to achieve the desired results.”

## **Pest plants and animals**

Pest plants continue to be a severe problem within the Swan Bay catchment with most of the remnant vegetation degraded to some extent. Steve Smithyman has been very active in the promotion of pest plant awareness and control alternatives for landholders.

Steve said that there appears to be a general apathy to controlling some noxious and environmental weeds,

but that with the help of local government and the Swan Bay Green Corps team, the group is making an impact.

“Over 20 kilometres of significant roadside vegetation in the catchment has been weeded, thanks to the City of Greater Geelong, NRE and the Swan Bay Green Corps team. One section of roadside was severely degraded by the local environmental weed, Italian Buckthorn.

“Serrated Tussock is also spreading into the catchment. We have been vigilant in identifying and removing any new infestations.” Steve said.

## **The future**

Strong networks and relationships between the stakeholders, combined with the single desire to protect Swan Bay, are the key drivers behind the success of the Swan Bay Integrated Catchment Management Project.

Both Sue Longmore and Steve Smithyman are sure that the relationships that they have facilitated and continue to develop, combined with the obvious changing landscape of the catchment as a result of successful on-ground projects, have formed a strong foundation for the future of Swan Bay.

For more information contact Steve Smithyman on 0417 231 853.

*One of the major revegetation projects two years after establishment.*



*Four years later. Alcoa staff from the Pt Henry smelter helped the group with the planting.*



# Environmental Management

What are Environmental Management Systems (EMS)? EMS is a term that will be commonly used by Australian farmers in the near future. EMS are already widely discussed by policy makers in Australia and are now routine for farmers in Europe and North America. In Ontario over 22,000 farmers are currently working on an environmental program in partnership with the Canadian government.

Farmers who have an EMS have a systematic approach to the responsible management of the impact of agricultural activities on the environment. An EMS sets out an on-farm management framework that achieves continuous improvement in natural resource management by integrating the best available management practices, whilst conforming to all relevant codes of practice.

## **Why implement an EMS?**

Australian farmers are keen to market agricultural produce as being clean and green. But there has been little justification, to date, of the green claim. EMS focuses on the environmental impacts of production – the green part,

whereas quality assurance systems aim to ensure the quality and consistency of the end product – the clean part.

Consumers at home and abroad are increasingly questioning farming methods, while the World Trade Organisation, led by the USA, Canada and Europe, is focusing on the relationship between trade liberalisation rules and how they relate to environmental protection policies. The threat of future world trade barriers related to environmental management is a cause for concern for Australian farmers.

## **The VFF and environmental management**

In 1986 the Victorian Farmers Federation was a major partner in the establishment of Landcare – a program that has achieved global recognition as the world's best land management movement.

In 2001 the VFF produced the highly regarded *Environmental Management Guide for Victorian Farmers*. The guide provides a framework for the development of specific industry codes of practice. It also defines the environmental management principles applicable to Victorian farmers and land managers.

The guide provides the basis for farmers and land managers to review their competencies and training needs in relation to natural resource management. It also provides the framework for classifying the provision of training services and providers.

## **Getting started with EMS**

It can be daunting for farmers and land managers to set about developing fully comprehensive environmental management systems for their properties. It makes sense to start with one or two key environmental issues that are relevant for any particular property, location or industry and aim to make improvements that can be monitored in some way.

For example, for a dairy farm the starting point for an EMS might be the management of dairy effluent. For hill country grazing properties the key environmental issues could be erosion, pest and weed control and revegetating recharge areas.

The overall aim should be to achieve continuous improvement in the management of natural resources by integrating the best available management practices, whilst conforming to all relevant codes of practice.

There are several good, practical projects that can help farmers get started with EMS. NRE's Environmental Best Management Practices on Farms Project has been successfully piloted in south-west Victoria.

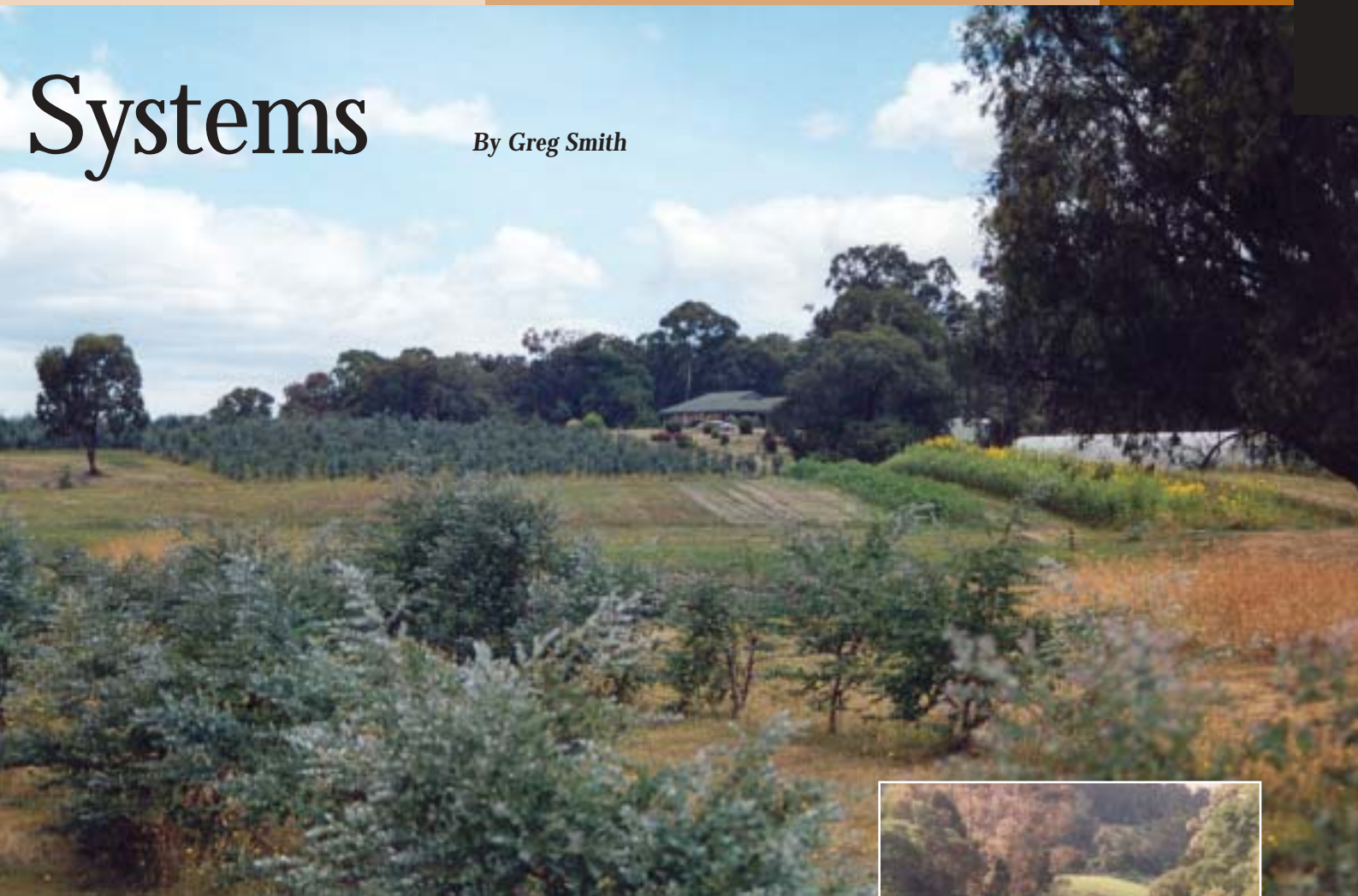
## **EMS training and implementation**

There is considerable interest and enthusiasm about EMS and how it might be implemented at the farm and catchment level in Victoria. However, there is some concern about the confusion that various interest groups might present to farmers and land managers in relation to EMS.



# Systems

By Greg Smith



A high-level EMS Policy Group with senior representatives from NRE and the VFF has recently been set up to address these issues.

It is expected that the EMS Policy Group will oversee the development of: a training program that will provide Victorian farmers and land managers with a basic understanding of EMS; how EMS relates to established QA programs; and how to commence the process of developing an on-farm EMS.

## ***Subsidy for environment management training***

Improved environmental and natural resource management is a priority for FarmBis – a government program that subsidises group or individual training for farmers, land managers and wild-catch fishers.

The FarmBis State Planning Group has introduced a 90% FarmBis subsidy for a wide range of training related to natural resource management, such as training in developing and implementing environmental management systems.

- A subsidy of 90% of the eligible cost applies to courses where at least 25% of the course content and learning outcomes relate to natural resource management. Eligible participants are primary producers.
- A subsidy of 90% of the eligible cost applies to courses that concentrate solely on natural resource management. Eligible participants are land managers.
- A subsidy of 90% of the eligible course cost applies to all courses undertaken by indigenous landowners or managers.

For more information about FarmBis call 13 61 86 or visit [www.nre.vic.gov.au/farmbis](http://www.nre.vic.gov.au/farmbis)



# Robinvale Rifle Range – on

By *Janelle Everitt*



The Rifle Range is a peaceful forest crown land reserve along the Murray River south-west of Robinvale. Over half of the site is pasture grassland with the remainder containing remnant Mallee scrub.

Prior to colonisation the Rifle Range was used all year round as an Aboriginal camping site. A large freshwater shell midden site can still be seen on the riverbank. At that time the Rifle Range was layered in thick Mallee scrub and was rich with native flora and fauna – such as goannas, frilled-neck lizards, snakes and many species of birds. This environment provided the Latje Latje people with an abundance of natural resources for food, shelter, medicine and cultural purposes.

Unfortunately the once unspoiled surroundings had been extensively degraded and almost destroyed. For many years the site was used as a rubbish dump and was littered with cars, parts and other waste. Off-road vehicles (particularly trail bikes) and uncontrolled stock grazing had almost destroyed the midden site and elevated salinity levels.

The combination of off-road vehicles and rabbit burrowing caused extensive gully erosion and the destabilisation of the river. The native vegetation had almost been ruined due to land clearance and recent uncontrolled stock grazing. The degradation of the environment meant the many species of fauna left their habitats in search of new areas for food and shelter.

*An example of the severe erosion and salinity problems on the riverbank.*

*From left, members of the local indigenous land management group – Bob Kennedy, Isaac (Kracker) Brown, Ronald Jackson, Luke Morgan (in car), Jim Marks and Allan Cassidy.*



# target for a flourishing future



From left, Ronald Jackson, Raymond Jackson and Bob Kennedy with the seed they have collected.

## **Manatunga community develops a plan**

In 1997 a management plan was developed by Aboriginal Affairs Victoria at the request of the Murray Valley Aboriginal Co-operative and the elders of the Robinvale Manatunga community for part of the Rifle Range forest. The community wanted to restore this part of the land back to its natural state and protect the cultural sites of their people.

Part of the process involved the community and the Murray Valley Aboriginal Co-operative submitting a successful application for funding to the Natural Heritage Trust. The NHT continue to provide ongoing funding for the project.

The Manatunga elders and community worked together to establish the objectives for the property. They included establishing a healthy natural and cultural environment, raising awareness in the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community about the inter-relationship of the natural and cultural environment and developing a skilled and capable indigenous community in natural and cultural resource management. The community also wants to promote reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities through joint involvement in Landcare.

## **Restoration, rehabilitation and protection**

The local Robinvale indigenous land management group was also aware that restoring the site back to its natural state would require extensive work. They made it clear that before any rehabilitation could begin all of the rubbish had to be removed so the site could begin to rehabilitate naturally.

Revegetation is one of the larger tasks for the project. The local Robinvale indigenous land management group, led by manager Bob Kennedy and with the assistance of Greening Australia, have collected numerous local seed varieties which will be planted this winter.

A further 2000 seedlings are being held at the Mildura Native Nursery Seedbank by Greening Australia for planting just before spring.

## **Knowledge flows in both directions**

Greening Australia have played a vital role in the success of the project and the development of skills in the community. Greening Australia's Mallee Region Officer, Brendan Thomas, has trained the group in plant identification, seed collection and the impact the seasons have on the environment. In turn the community have shown Greening Australia the inherent connection, knowledge and responsibility indigenous people have with the land, water and environment.

Brendan Thomas says he has found immense satisfaction in working with the group.

"You learn so much about their culture and about the history of our society. We would really like to get them an end product and to be able to work with them on future projects."

According to Bob Kennedy Greening Australia have worked hard to understand local culture and heritage and have respected the relationship the indigenous community has with the land and environment.

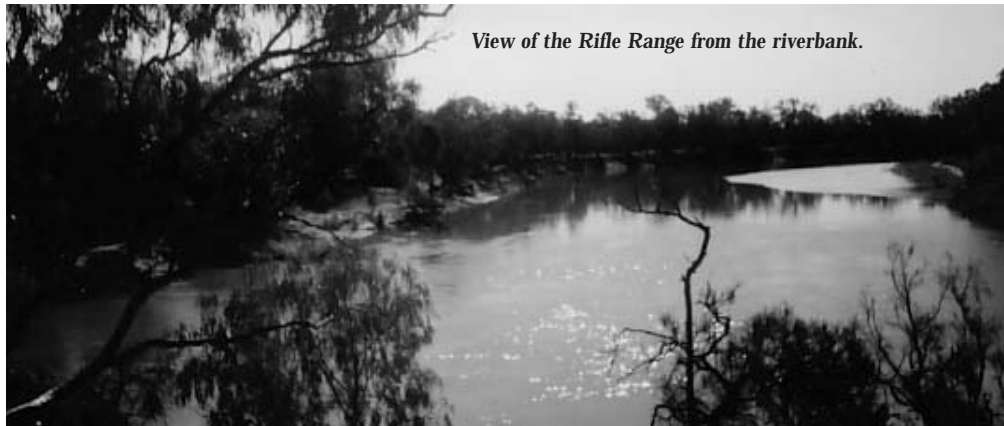
"Greening Australia's involvement has meant we have got much further with the project much quicker. It is very much a two-way communication process which also gives us the opportunity to make the decisions," Bob Kennedy says.

The indigenous land management group is highly committed to the project. They are currently undertaking the Australian Land Management and Restoration Certificate at Sunraysia TAFE and have put in a great deal of time, hard work and technical knowledge. Tenille Kennedy, from the Robinvale campus of Sunraysia TAFE, has been instrumental in the organisation of the crew and success of the course.

Bob Kennedy says that when the Rifle Range project is completed the community will have gained the skills to not only pass the TAFE course but also to move on to other projects and employment.

"The environment benefits and we benefit too. By protecting and restoring the land the elders and the community are protecting their culture into the future."

For further information contact Bob Kennedy on 5026 4866.



View of the Rifle Range from the riverbank.



# ON THE SHELF – New Publications



## **Rural Law Handbook – A Guide for Primary Producers**

Managing a farm is an increasingly complex task. A large number of laws now regulate nearly every aspect of primary production. Covering over 150 areas of Victorian and Commonwealth law, the *Rural Law Handbook* is a comprehensive resource, providing practical plain language answers to legal questions.

Former VFF President Peter Walsh commended the book, saying it is a valuable publication that covers all of the legal issues farmers are most likely to confront in running their businesses.

The *Rural Law Handbook* is \$38 plus postage and handling. Call 9602 2877 or order online at [www.victorialaw.org.au](http://www.victorialaw.org.au)

## **Living Systems Resource Kit**

The Living Systems Project is a statewide project of NRE with financial support from the Natural Heritage Trust. The project is working with the agricultural industry and interested organisations to include biodiversity in property management planning.

This new resource kit is a practical toolkit for facilitators and educators. It is full of activities, fact sheets, case studies, contact details, references and calendars to assist people in integrating biodiversity management into existing training courses or as a basis for developing new courses.

The resource kit comes as a CD with an introductory booklet or can be accessed on the NRE website at [www.nre.vic.gov.au](http://www.nre.vic.gov.au)

## **Green Pages**

Also produced by the Living Systems Project, *Green Pages* is a credit card-sized contacts book for native biodiversity and natural resource management advice.

This handy little guide lists a surprisingly large range of organisations and includes a run-down of their responsibilities as well as contact details. Available free of charge from the NRE Information Centre on 9637 8325.

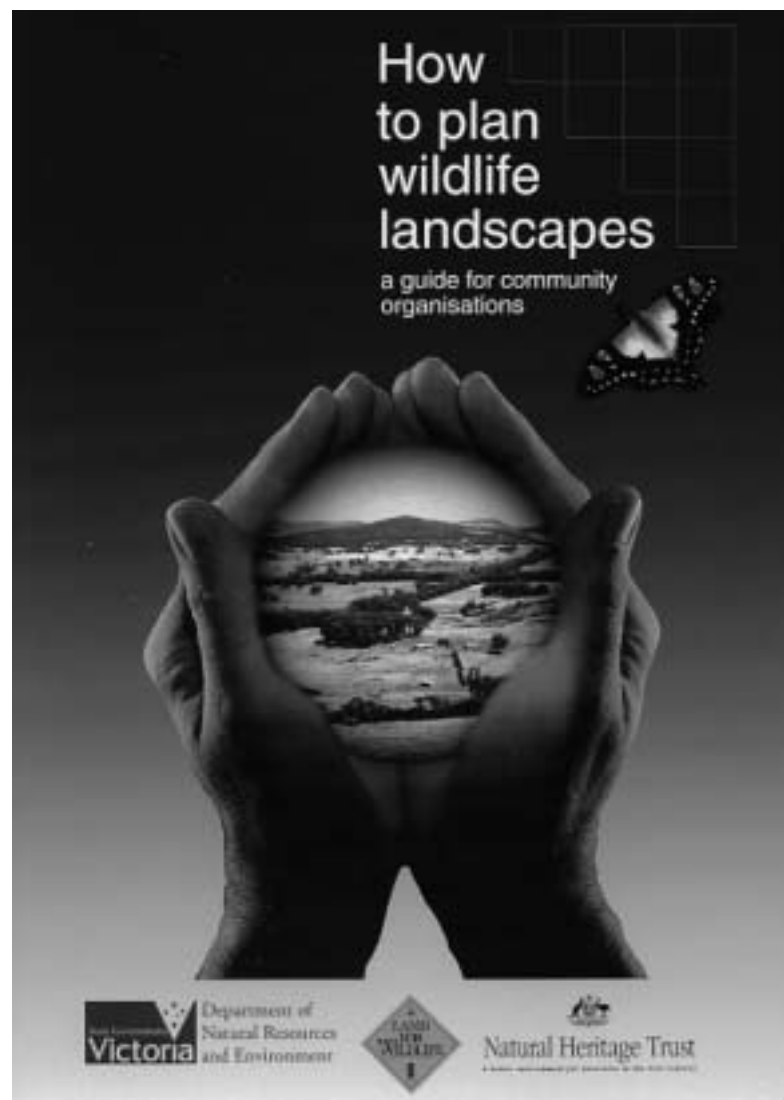
## **How to Plan Wildlife Landscapes**

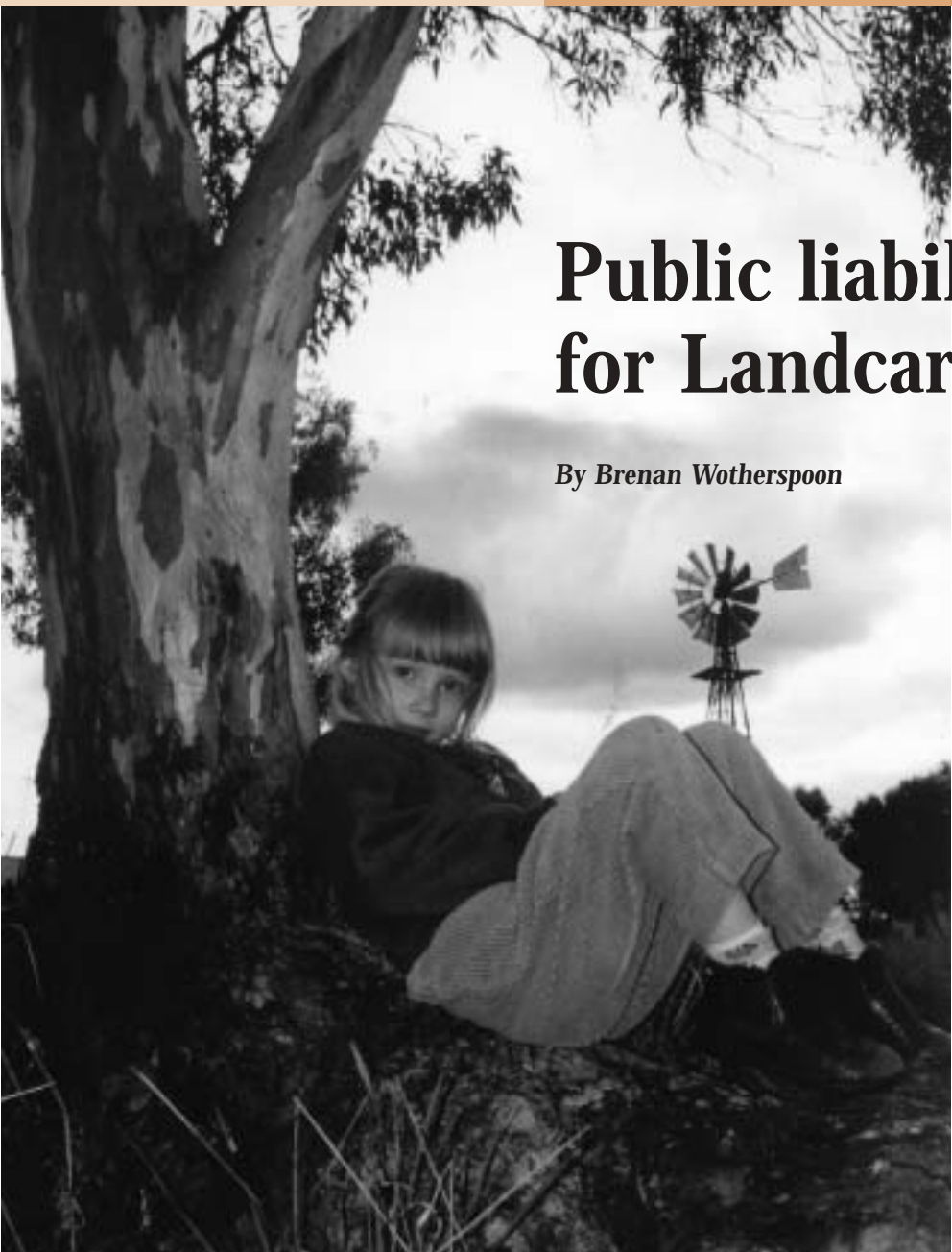
Yet another Living Systems Project publication, *How to Plan Wildlife Landscapes* outlines the principles used in planning for conservation of native wildlife at a landscape scale such as a neighbourhood, or part of a catchment. It will be useful for community organisations and individuals who want to understand how to act more strategically to protect and restore wildlife landscapes.

One free copy is available to each Victorian Landcare group until supplies

run out. For your group copy, send a stamped (\$1.47) self-addressed envelope (265 x 215mm, B5 or larger) to Stephen Platt, Wildlife Landscapes Guide – [name of group], NRE, PO Box 500, East Melbourne 3002 or email [stephen.platt@nre.vic.gov.au](mailto:stephen.platt@nre.vic.gov.au) to arrange to collect a copy from your nearest major NRE office.

Additional copies are available from the NRE Information Centre at \$16 plus postage by calling 9637 8325.





# Public liability insurance for Landcare groups

By *Brenan Wotherspoon*

The NLIP was made compulsory for member groups of the VFF Farm Tree & Landcare Association in 1997. Investigations by the Association at the time found the NLIP to offer the best deal for Landcare groups in terms of cost and coverage.

As well as providing cover for public liability, including cover for the use of spray equipment, the NLIP also provides cover for product liability and personal accident insurance. Even with recent hefty increases in the premium the Association still believes the NLIP is the best insurance option for Landcare groups.

## ***Maintaining the premium pool***

The maintenance of the premium pool is vital to ensure the continued viability of the NLIP. The danger is if the number of participating Landcare groups declines this will add further pressure to the premium. This includes individual groups seeking insurance as a network.

If the cost of insurance has become an issue for your Landcare group contact your CMA to see what assistance, they may be able to offer. If the CMA is not able to offer assistance then ensure they are made aware that the cost of insurance is a major issue for your group.

If your Landcare group is currently uninsured and wish to obtain further information about the National Landcare Insurance Program, please contact VFF Farm Tree & Landcare Association on 9207 5527 or Aradlay Insurance Brokers on (02) 9953 7722.

Events of 2001 drastically changed the public liability insurance market. Premiums skyrocketed and, for a number of enterprises, cover for public liability insurance was no longer available.

The recommended approach to ensure continuation of cover at a reasonable price is for like organisations to join forces to form and maintain a premium pool.

## ***National Landcare Insurance Program***

The majority of Landcare groups in Australia that carry public liability insurance subscribe to the National Landcare Insurance Program (NLIP)

administered by Aradlay Insurance Brokers. Currently around 2000 Landcare groups subscribe to the NLIP.

This number represents a substantial premium pool and is the major reason why the NLIP was able to secure an underwriter for 2002 and contain the increase in the premium. The 2002 annual premium (\$235) was up significantly on the 2001 premium (\$180), but the size of the increase was nowhere near as large as the reported increases in premiums that confronted other community organisations and enterprises seeking cover.

*Two Whole Farm Planning Officers have recently been appointed in north-east Victoria, The purpose?  
To help plan for the future in farming, to look ahead, to explore the prospects and opportunities that may await.*

## Whole farm planning in the North East

The road ahead is often obstructed by day-to-day life. The way we progress is often confused by a fork in the road, a thunderstorm, or flat tyre. We finally reach our destination but it was a hard slog. We are good at planning today and tomorrow, but what about 10 years from now or when our children are old enough to take over?

The take-up of whole farm planning in the north-east region has been very strong. Farmers, landholders and Landcare groups have been planning to plan. Groups, individuals and industry groups have had a new zest and vitality for whole farm planning (WFP).

According to Whole Farm Planning Project Officer, Andrew Scanlon, the whole style of farming is changing.

“People are diversifying, looking for new ways to make money, new ways to sustainably utilise their assets. Farmers are leasing more land. Trying to free up capital and reduce debt repayments. Farmers are more mobile, more open to new ideas and willing to investigate options and learning.

“The demographic is also changing, more people are choosing to move to regional areas to start a new life in farming, large farms are being split up to accommodate for the demand, more and more people derive their main income off-farm.”



**Andrew Scanlon conducting a whole farm planning session at Wooragee near Beechworth.**

Andrew Scanlon is aiming to complete 200 plans by December. He thinks he will easily reach the target.

“People are very interested in the process. Part of the attraction is getting an aerial photograph and being able to plot your interests, ideas and aims. Landholders come to the courses because they have trouble visualising the plan without the photograph.”



**Wooragee Landcare Group members discuss whole farm planning over lunch.**

Another key aspect of whole farm planning is being able to express ideas to partners, spouses, family and friends. It also goes a long way in planning an integrated catchment approach to farming activities, helping to express ideas that complement the directions of planners and policy makers, scientist and researchers, economists and financiers.

“The essence of whole farm planning is in the desire to forge a future. Land managers need to accept that there are ebbs and flows. That the market will fluctuate, rainfall will vary and policy will come and go. People need to understand that environmental degradation is not insurmountable, it just requires strength of purpose, support from others and understanding the pitfalls,” Andrew said.

For more information contact Andrew Scanlon on (02) 6055 6102.

# plodding!

## Whole farm planning in the Goulburn Broken

The Goulburn Broken CMA have initiated a whole farm planning pilot program in the dryland area using National Action Plan (NAP) Foundation funding. Ross Jones from NRE is conducting the six-month pilot program, developing a simple and easily accessible whole farm planning course and evaluating how the program can be extended across the catchment.

The pilot program focuses on natural resource management and has been developed to cater for a range of landholders from full-time farmers to those more interested in the lifestyle side of owning land. The three pilot groups are the Molyullah, Burnt Creek and Glenaroua groups. By the middle of August 58 landholders will have completed the course.

According to Ross Jones the course has generated a lot of interest across the catchment with many groups and individuals keen to undertake the course in the future.

“The aim is not to have people expert in natural resource management, but to better understand the resources they have and how to manage them. With increasing numbers of lifestyle landholders in the catchment, particularly in areas close to Melbourne, there are a large number of new landholders keen to undertake this type of course, as well as many existing landholders who can see the benefits of long-term planning.”

Participants in the pilot program are also encouraged to undertake business planning to ensure the implementation of the resource plan complements all aspects



*Molyullah Tatong Landcare Group members look at land classing on John Ryan's property.*

of property management. The course also links in to other programs and grants that will assist landholders to manage the natural resources on their land.

The courses consist of either two and a half days, or three night sessions with a half-day in the field. The sessions are followed by a property visit that enables the participants to talk about their property and to discuss in more detail the plans they have developed.

The property visit also provides the opportunity to look at problem areas and develop some options on how to better manage the land. Course participants receive an aerial photograph, contour overlay, three clear overlays and course notes covering a variety of natural resource issues.

Ross believes the diverse backgrounds of the participants and the encouragement of group interaction have resulted in a great learning environment. This has also allowed a large amount of local knowledge to be used in the development of the plans.

“The participants have commented on the friendly, relaxed nature of the courses which has allowed them to gain knowledge in a way that is enjoyable. I hope the positive nature of the learning experience will lead to their involvement in other courses. That will improve their knowledge resulting in better resource management in the future.”

For more information contact David Smith on 5761 1611.

# Landcare steps forward in West Gippsland

By Martin Fuller



Landcare in the West Gippsland CMA region took a big leap forward recently with the running of a major regional Landcare workshop at Rawson.

For the first time, the workshop brought together a diverse cross-section of the region's Landcare, industry, agency and local government representatives to focus on the future of Landcare in the West Gippsland region. Over 50 participants attended the two-day event.

The workshop aimed to develop a Landcare support strategy or action plan for the region and to build a core group of committed people to take the actions forward.

Using an Open Space format the workshop allowed individuals to set the agenda and run specific sessions on over 20 topics. In doing this a wide range of issues were tabled for consideration.



*Jeff Clark from the Poowong Landcare Group lists an issue for discussion during the first session of the workshop.*

Professional NRE Facilitators, Nicole Hunter and Frankie MacLennan, provided the framework and kept the show running, but the actual working groups and action planning was undertaken by the participants themselves. This helped to create a strong sense of ownership of the process and the final results.

The first day of the workshop focused on the participant's experience of Landcare life – the glad, the sad, the mad and the bad! It provided an opportunity for everyone to share experiences and identify how they might benefit from further action. This reflection was used to develop specific issues that could be explored in greater depth and develop specific action plans during the second day.

Examples of the key issues raised and explored at the workshop were:

- spreading the Landcare message and raising awareness;
- achieving better biodiversity outcomes through Landcare;
- developing Junior Landcare;
- maintaining enthusiasm;
- developing better partnerships; and
- influencing policy and maintaining community ownership and drive while being supported by the government.

The workshop was part of the NHT-supported State-wide Landcare into the 21st Century Project, which saw all CMA regions across the State develop better support mechanism for Landcare at the regional level.

In West Gippsland this involved an independent analysis of Landcare and provided a regional perspective for the CMA on how Landcare operates and functions in West Gippsland. Jonathan Sobels and Alan Curtis from Charles Sturt University Johnstone Centre undertook this independent analysis. Their report also provided a number of recommendations that would help lead to better support in the region.

The Rawson workshop was a follow-up activity to the independent analysis and is part of a number of measures the West Gippsland CMA is implementing to better support Landcare throughout the region.

For further information contact Martin Fuller on 5662 4555.



*Trish Fleming from Fish Creek Landcare Group, Frankie MacLennan, Workshop Facilitator and Lyn Mitchard from Mt Lyall Landcare Group nut out some issues.*