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Victorian Landcare

& CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT

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dairy project

Kids caring for catchments

SEASON'S GREETINGS

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Grace Cayley enjoys the wildflowers at
Blackburn Lake Sanctuary in the City of
Whitehorse. By Rawdon Sthradher.

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From the editors

The drought

As we get further into summer many farmers and rural communities are doing it very hard.

The drought is taking its toll on stock, crops, water supplies and the people on the land.

In Victoria some government assistance has now been announced. It is pleasing to see that the private sector is also taking a hand in this critical issue. The Farmhand Foundation has been formed to provide immediate relief to people suffering the effects of drought and to promote long-term strategies to help drought-proof Australian agriculture.

The Farmhand Foundation is linked to the Australian Red Cross. If you are in a position to help please make a secure online

donation through the Australian Red Cross Farmhand Foundation for Drought Relief website at www.redcross.org.au

Victoria's youngest Landcarer?

The Sandy Creek Landcare Group is always on the lookout for new members and age is certainly no barrier.

Earlier this year they signed up Matilda Donkin. Matilda was presented with an honorary membership certificate and a rose bush. Group secretary Joan Brookshaw said she slept through the ceremony – but that's ok as she was only two weeks old at the time!

Matilda's parents, Will and Karly Donkin, accepted the honours on her behalf. We wish her a long and happy association with Landcare.



Young Matilda Donkin receives her Sandy Creek Landcare Group membership certificate.

Thanks to Mark Costello

A change in roles and responsibilities at NRE means we say farewell and thank you to Mark Costello in this issue and welcome back to Mike Gooley.

Mike Gooley, Lyall Grey and Carrie Tiffany

Junior Landcare Grants

Following a successful first year for the Mitre 10 and Landcare Australia partnership, Mitre 10 is now focusing on getting Australia's youth more involved in looking after our environment through the Mitre 10 Junior Landcare Grants Program.

The Program, which will be launched in time for the 2003 school year, aims to create three-way community relationships between Landcare, Mitre 10/other corporate sponsors and schools/youth groups and encourage ownership through involvement.

Schools that are planning Landcare projects in partnership with local Landcare groups will be able to apply for grants to assist them with the cost of their projects.

Schools and youth groups can access information about the program and a grant application form through the Mitre 10 website – www.mitre10.com.au. The website also includes a number of case studies on schools who have undertaken successful Landcare projects in the past.

Along with the grants program, Junior Landcare also includes a program that focuses on educating students about the sustainable management of our natural resources and includes the interactive environmental education program Ollie Saves the Planet.

This program aims to teach 5 to 13 year-olds and their teachers and parents about the five key issues of waste, water, energy, air and biodiversity under the organising principle of sustainability. Every primary school in Australia has now received a free copy of Ollie Saves the Planet. Ollie will also soon be seen in other countries, including the United Kingdom and the United States, delivering the message: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle and Rethink!

For further information contact Jodie Lewin at Landcare Australia on (02) 9412 1040.



IN BRIEF

Gippslander appointed as National Landcare Facilitator

Coral Love has been appointed as the new National Landcare Facilitator. With her strong rural background and many years of working in Gippsland, Coral brings a deep insight into the many challenges and opportunities for rural and regional Australians to the three-year position.

Coral was the Landcare Facilitator with the East Gippsland Landcare Network for four years. Most recently she has worked in Rural Community Development with the Victorian Office of Rural Communities.

She was awarded the Inaugural Heather Mitchell Memorial Fellowship in 2000 for her significant contribution to Landcare. A member of the Victorian Second Generation Landcare Taskforce from 2000-2002, Coral worked with the team to develop an action plan, *Healthy*

Landscapes Sustainable Communities, which was launched by the State Minister for Environment in May 2002.

Coral works with the Geelong-based Rural Resources Group who manage the project and takes over from her predecessor, Lachlan Polkinghorne, who was in the position for more than five years.

The Weekly Times wins National Landcare Award

The Victorian-based newspaper *The Weekly Times* – which has been operating since 1869 – has been presented with the Sigma Landcare Media Award for its service to the environment by Prime Minister John Howard.

The Weekly Times was commended for its massive far-reaching educational campaign about weeds, which continue to be a huge environmental problem across Victoria and the nation.

Weekly Times Editor, Peter Flaherty, said *The Weekly Times* decided to focus on weeds because it is an issue close to the hearts of all Landcare volunteers.

2003 National Landcare Conference

Making some plans for next year? The 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.

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

Wimmera Landcare on the worldwide web

A Wimmera Landcare website has celebrated one year in cyberspace. 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.

New National Landcare Facilitator, Coral Love.





New one- in the

Stephen and Lisa Cross own and operate the well-known Leura Park Estate vineyard at Drysdale on the Bellarine Peninsula. They are participating in the new Environmental Best Management Practices (EBMP) Program being trialled across south-west Victoria by over 400 farmers in 23 community groups.

EBMP is funded by the Natural Heritage Trust and supported by the Corangamite and Glenelg CMAs and NRE. It aims to improve farm environments and productivity by working one-on-one with farmers to address environmental issues and to introduce the idea of adopting quality assurance and environmental management systems to secure better returns by promoting a clean green image.

Other benefits include benchmarking environmental management practices against others, updating management skills including health and safety and improving natural resource management by recording detailed action plans across catchments.

Stephen Cross is one of 22 farmers on the Bellarine Peninsula approached by local co-ordinator David Lean from NRE. (There are 18 co-ordinators working with hundreds of farmers in the Glenelg and Corangamite regions.)

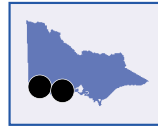
Stephen says EBMP makes farmers look at their business from an environmental angle to get the best out of their property.

“At Leura Park Estate pests are controlled, waterways fenced off, windbreaks established and nutrients contained – and all this costs money. But it is necessary in order to improve our business and remain viable into the future.”

EBMP is a continuous improvement process where farmers first self-assess their

Stephen Cross cradling his award-winning Chardonnay and an Environmental Best Management Practice booklet.

on-one farm practice south-west



own properties and management skills by working one-on-one with their local co-ordinator to develop farm plans, then committing to improving environmental issues on their own farms by using maps, benchmarking and developing detailed action plans. Topics covered include soils, farm plans, water, vegetation, chemicals, weeds, pests, nutrients and effluent/waste disposal.

David Lean says farmer interest has been high, with good support from industry groups.

“All self-assessments are confidential, there is no financial data required and there is no cost to participate, yet the benefits to farmers are many. They can obtain plans, maps and benchmarking graphs; they can organise funding for improvements and take a good look at health and safety issues on the farm.

“There is also the opportunity to get a second opinion on the environmental status of their property by discussing things with EBMP co-ordinators – most of whom live locally; some are farmers involved with community groups in their own area.”

EBMP also benefits agencies, funding bodies and resource managers by putting detailed action plans into place across entire catchments. This high level of detail has never been available before and is of enormous assistance with planning and budgeting. For example, where a local government is considering rate rebates for farms showing good levels of environmental performance EBMP data can be used as proof.

For further information contact David Lean on 5226 4560.

Out and about with Una Allender

Una Allender is the EBMP co-ordinator at Wallaura in the Glenelg-Hopkins region and a local farmer. Una says one of the good things about EBMP is that it provides a reason for contacting and visiting farmers who would not otherwise have any contact with Landcare or other environmental or farm planning programs.

When Una visits a farm she discusses the EBMP workbooks and action plans and asks farmers if she can supply them with any specific information.

“We’ve had some great discussions. A wide range of topics come up from agroforestry species to direct seeding, to native grasses for saline soils, to rabbit control and water testing, the list goes on.

“I am made aware of what the farmer wants to know and, in researching and providing the information, I learn about the topic too.”

Una hopes that landholders will be encouraged by this experience to pursue information and advice in the future, leading to larger numbers of farmers taking up more sustainable farming practices.

The EBMP facilitators at a workshop in Mortlake earlier this year.



The Goulburn-Broken Landcare

Management of natural resources in the Goulburn-Broken catchment is increasingly challenging, especially with spreading salinity, erosion and pest plants and animals, combined with the loss of biodiversity. Dry conditions add further stress on farms and natural habitats as well as livestock and native species.

A project of the Goulburn-Broken CMA, in partnership with NRE, the Shires of Mitchell and Murrindindi and the National Landcare Program, aims to increase landholder awareness about the responsibilities of land stewardship through sustainable land management practices.

Allan and Sheila Stute and Warren and Sue Werrett are landholders with contrasting land use needs, yet both are achieving ecological sustainability on their properties by adopting essential land management practices.

Rotational grazing works for the Stutes

Allan and Sheila Stute have been farming their 141-hectare property near Broadford for 40 years. Their enthusiasm for continually improving the property for prime lambs yet also ensuring environmental benefits reflects their commitment to sustainable agriculture.

“Sustainability on the land is the essence of Landcare,” says Allan, an active, long-term member of the Sunday Creek/Dry Creek Landcare Group.

In just over two years, the Stutes have doubled their property’s carrying capacity to 1150 ewes and 100 weaners. This has been achieved by adopting intensive rotational grazing practices, with sheep moved frequently around several three-hectare paddocks. Even after a long, dry summer when the autumn break is later than ever, recently spelled paddocks have short but green grass which responds quickly following rain. The property has mainly native grass cover, with phalaris, cocksfoot and clover introduced in some areas.

Although rotational grazing involves intensive management of pastures, watering points and stock, Allan encourages more farmers to take up this approach.

“It takes the guesswork out of farming because I am able to calculate stock feed requirements and pasture availability per head well in advance, with options for different climatic conditions that may occur. It is not an option though for

people with weekend properties as the livestock need daily attention.”

The Stutes have also carried out essential environmental management activities such as fencing out and revegetating sensitive creek and hilltop environments as well as creating shelterbelts of native trees and shrubs. They are thrilled with the results. Erosion has ceased, with clear water now flowing in the creek compared with when it was laden with silt, and the pastures have improved due to shelter from the wind.

Allan regularly sprays weeds such as blackberry and briar and digs out stray thistles and other weeds as soon as he finds them.

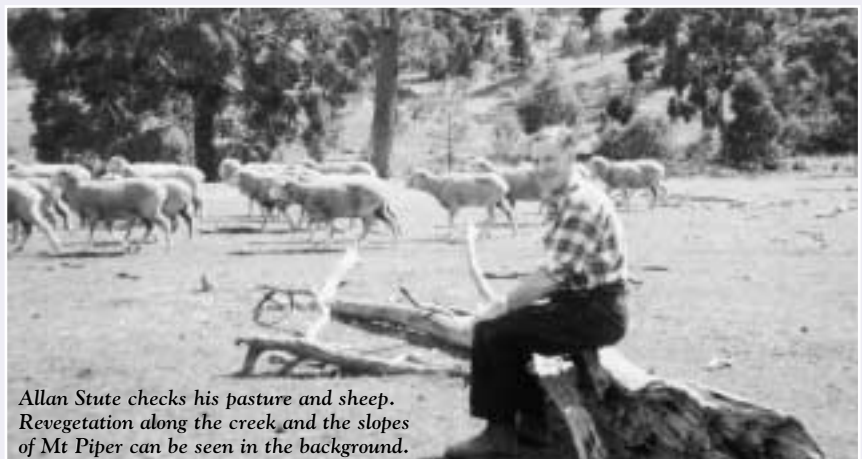
He says keeping weeds in check is critical as they can significantly reduce pasture productivity, may have

detrimental effects on livestock and native animals and control costs rise rapidly if they get out of control.

In addition to his involvement with Landcare, Allan is participating in the Pastures for Profit Program organised by the Goulburn Ovens Institute of TAFE.

“The course teaches participants about pasture management and it is also important for networking – especially exchanging ideas among participants who are eager to share their practical experiences.”

Allan says this has been particularly valuable during this dry period when tough decisions need to be made about stocking rates. With the dry conditions likely to continue, Allan and Sheila are planning to selectively sell their older sheep, before the stock and land show signs of stress.



Allan Stute checks his pasture and sheep. Revegetation along the creek and the slopes of Mt Piper can be seen in the background.

The Werretts battle gorse at Kilmore

Warren and Sue Werrett bought their 14-hectare property near Kilmore because of its proximity to Melbourne, the lifestyle opportunities it provides and because they wanted to help improve the local environment through their Landcare efforts.

Not daunted by heavy infestations of gorse along steep creek banks, or the thistles and rabbits that occur, they are working towards a five-year plan of action. Their vision is to restore the land to its former natural beauty, making it an enjoyable and sustainable place to live.

Despite having full-time jobs off the land, Warren and Sue can already see the benefits of their efforts over the past year and a half. The property is now part of the Land for Wildlife scheme. Following repeated spraying, cutting and removal the gorse is almost under control. Although they appreciate that it will need constant attention for a long time, as gorse seed stays viable in the ground for many years.

With the assistance of grants from the Willomavin Landcare Group and Sunday Creek/Sugarloaf Collective, the Werretts have fenced off almost half the property for revegetation with local trees and shrubs. Self-seeded eucalypts and wattles are visible among the few, remnant Manna Gums, Swamp Gums and Yellow Box.

Warren and Sue are active members of the Willomavin Landcare Group. They recognise the need to work together with their neighbours and

Rob Reid and Kato operator Scott Hough removing tall, dense gorse bushes amongst young River Red Gums along the Dry Creek at Broadford.



the local community to control gorse, thistles and rabbits and to minimise the chance of reinfestation, especially along creeks.

“We plan to get a few goats to help with thistle control in the short term, and perhaps other livestock in the future when the trees are more established. The shelterbelt plantings will benefit any livestock with essential shade and wind protection as well as providing habitat for native wildlife,” says Warren.

Rob Reid, facilitator for the Sunday Creek/Sugarloaf Collective, encourages all landholders to follow the Werrett's approach. He says that gorse spreads so rapidly that in only a couple of years it can go from costing \$200 in chemical spray from a knapsack to thousands of dollars using large machinery.

Rob Reid works systematically along gorse infested creeks such as Kurkurac and Dry creeks in the Kilmore and Broadford areas. The Collective provides financial assistance to local landholders to help them remove gorse along their sections of the creek and then revegetate the creek banks with native vegetation.

For further information contact Ann Jelinek on 5735 4348 or 0439 972 012.

Warren Werrett and companion Mitzy standing near a creek that was badly infested with gorse. More gorse control work is in progress in the background.



Our

Landcarers

Mary Argall –

In the mid-1990s a botanist from Melbourne University was bragging in the Kiata pub about a rare orchid he had found in the Kiata Flora Reserve. He was quite pleased with himself for having found 33 separate plants of this particular spider orchid. From the other end of the bar a quiet yet firm female voice invited the botanist to go for a drive and find a few more. With Mary Argall's local knowledge they ended up tagging 57 plants.

It was a lesson well learnt by the Melbourne botanist – don't underestimate local knowledge. Local knowledge is something that Mary Argall, a member of West Wimmera Tree Group, Friends of Little Desert and the Gerang Landcare Group, has plenty of.

Mary has spent countless hours in her red Mini Moke with her faithful dog, Possum, scouting for rare orchids.

"This is my first and major passion," Mary says. "I spend hours hunting for orchids. I find them and then try and protect them from rabbits and weeds.

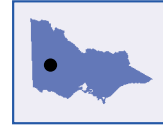
"Once you've spotted your first one you're right."

Below: A clump of pink fingers, Caladenia carnea, offer a show of colour in the bush. Due to six unseasonably dry years and a particularly dry winter and spring this year, orchid numbers are well down in the Kiata district.



Above: Mary and companion Possum crouch in a patch of gazanias and veldt grass – two of Mary's pet weed dislikes. Mary is part of a regional push to raise awareness of how gazanias, a hardy garden plant, are a major problem on urban nature strips and roadsides.





orchid woman of the Wimmera

By Melissa Pouliot

Mary's partner Darryl comes out orchid hunting sometimes too which Mary is pleased about as he has a very keen eye. Darryl Argall is also well known in the local community for his involvement with local government, the Wimmera CMA, Project Hindmarsh, the Wimmera Mallee Piping Project steering committee and a number of other groups and causes.

The birth of Project Hindmarsh

According to Mary, ten years ago Darryl wasn't at all interested in conservation, but then Project Hindmarsh came along and now he is unstoppable.

Project Hindmarsh, now going into its fifth year, has made popular the concept of establishing biolinks to create corridors of native vegetation.

The project has seen the formation of strong Landcare networks in Yarriambiack and Hindmarsh shires, which between them have attracted more than \$200,000 in corporate sponsorship for the tree planting weekends alone.

The Hindmarsh Biolink tree planting weekends have involved more than 1400 people and resulted in more than \$25,000 extra income each year for Hindmarsh Shire towns.

Mary can clearly remember the very beginning of the project when environmental consultant Rob Scalzo, West Wimmera Tree Group President John Oldfield*, Greening Australia's Ron Dodds, naturalist Clive Crouch and herself and Darryl spread out the plans and maps on the lounge room floor.

"From the moment Darryl saw the first report he was taken with the project. I thought it was too big. I couldn't comprehend getting everything organised that ended up being Project Hindmarsh and the Hindmarsh Landcare network. But Darryl has thrived on it."

The search for native wattles

Mary is happy to keep a low profile and pursue her passions quietly. Her most recent interest is native wattles. This came about through seed collecting for the Hindmarsh Biolink planting weekend, held in August.

The list of seeds included 14 different wattles and Mary only knew about four or five. It has been a steep learning curve that has led to a serious concern for the proliferation of gall-affected varieties.

"My list said to collect 500 grams of mealy wattle seed but I've only managed to find 40 grams from bushes that were gall-free," she said.

"West Wimmera Tree Group is going to plant some small pockets in areas where these wattles are found to ensure the continuance of this species.

"It's a bit of a pet project of mine to get some planted, but it's nearly orchid season so I'll be pretty busy."

** One of the founders of Hindmarsh Landcare Network and West Wimmera Tree Group President for many years, John Oldfield was a driving force behind the completion of Rob Scalzo's report which led to Project Hindmarsh. John's passion for the local environment came to fruition through the Hindmarsh Landcare Network and Project Hindmarsh. John Oldfield was a valued member of the Wimmera community and was involved in a large number of groups and committees. These included the Wimmera Conservation Farming*



A blue scented sun orchid, *Thelymitra megalyptra*.

Association, Friends of the Malleefowl, Nhill Bird Observer's Group and Trust for Nature. John died in 2000, but his contribution will never be forgotten.

This story was prepared by Melissa Pouliot on behalf of the Wimmera CMA.

Kids caring for catchments

One of the largest and most ambitious Landcare projects in Victoria is pushing successfully to meeting its target of fostering 444,000 trees – thanks to the dedicated efforts of the community and a leading initiative to involve local schools.

Knowing that the 444,000 Trees Project, based around the area north of Warrnambool and Port Fairy, was always going to be ambitious, Karen Wales and Bruce Mirtschin from the Hopkins Moyne Land Management & Farm Tree Group understood they would need lots of help.

Karen explained that many of the trees have been planted using a combination of direct seeding and planting of seedlings on other sites. This year the group aimed to plant 100,000 seedlings and needed as many people involved as possible.

“The Alcoa Landcare Program has helped us start our Kids Caring 4 Catchments Program,” Karen explained.

She said the program involves going out to local schools and giving an in-class presentation about the project, followed by an activity of some kind before the students travel out in buses to a planting site.

“We needed to update the in-class program to cover various age groups and knowledge levels,” said Karen.

She approached the Natural Resource Management section of South West TAFE in Warrnambool to seek their support.

“The TAFE was a really useful partnership. As a part of the TAFE students’ work experience, I worked with a team to develop three new modules for our in-class presentations which covered why we needed to plant trees and hands-on segments on habitat, water quality and macro invertebrates.

“The new modules meant that the school students understood why they were going out to plant trees and how important it is for their local environment – the kids



Site leaders

understood the issues and really put great effort into doing the job.”

Karen said the TAFE students were also instrumental in delivering the modules to most of the schools and were a great help with going out on sites to assist the children planting.

“All of the schools in the district approached to get involved have responded positively to the project and the educational elements of it,” said Karen.

“In total, 28 school groups have been out to planting sites and 40 in-class presentations have been made, involving 1600 students with over 35,000 trees being planted as a result”.



By Paul Crock

Community involvement

The 15 committee members of the Hopkins-Moyne Group have made a big commitment to the project by donating their time, with at least one member attending each of the 28 school plantings plus the two Community Planting Days.

“The two Community Planting Days saw over 300 people plant over 26,000 trees on 17 sites,” said Karen.

“Through the schools project, the awareness of environmental issues is growing and there is a strong willingness in the community to help address issues such as water quality and developing habitat for native animals.”

“The majority of people involved live locally and many have planted with the 444,000 Trees Project in previous years so we now have a great experienced skills base in our region.”

Karen explained that every successful army marched on its stomach, and the



Jenny and Joshua Cannon from Penshurst at the Hawkesdale Community Planting Day

army of community volunteers was always well fed thanks to the Rotary Club of Warrnambool.

“The Rotarians have been a great supporter of the project and again provided the delicious lunches and BBQ afterwards,” she said.

So far the project has involved 186 landholders, with the majority first

time planters of indigenous trees on their property.

“The lessons and experience from this project will be utilised for many years to come,” said Karen.

For more information regarding the 444,000 Trees Project's schools initiative, contact Karen Wales on 5560 7354.

Planting along a degraded waterway.



Dinning's dairy clean-up

By Margrit Beemster

There is actually something quite aesthetically pleasing about the new effluent pond behind the Dinning's dairy at Hansonville, 25 kilometres from Wangaratta in north-east Victoria.

David and Adam Dinning discuss their plans for the family dairy farm at Hansonville.



Perhaps it's a combination of a crisp winter morning, blue skies and the green cover of newly germinated grass against the still waters of the pond. Or perhaps it is dairyfarmer David Dinning's satisfaction in knowing that he's helping protect the environment by containing all his dairy effluent on-farm.

David Dinning is a fourth generation farmer. His father, Nelson, began dairy farming on the 218-hectare farm 34 years ago.

David has been concerned about effluent for some time. He put in two smaller effluent ponds several years ago to stop the effluent going off-farm into the Fifteen Mile Creek, even though the creek is two miles away. More recently he was concerned that as he increased the size of his milking herd the system really wasn't adequate.

"Ten years ago it wasn't an issue. We were milking less cows, had a smaller dairy and there were smaller cement yards with less run-off."

David's father started with a herd of 30 dairy cows and a two-unit walk-through dairy. From there it went to a four-unit double-up herringbone dairy; then a six. In 1996 David decided to invest over \$100,000 in a new 20-side swingover dairy with Larsen gates capable of handling 200 cows an hour.

His dairy herd has now reached 220 head, primarily jersey's. The dairy is very much a family concern with David's wife Jenny and son Adam both working on the farm.

David is an active participant and past president of the Greta Valley Landcare Group which has planted more than 6000 trees and understorey species on his farm.



He describes himself as environmentally conscious and knew he wanted to do something about his effluent management.

He was a keen participant in one of the early effluent planning workshops run in Moyhu/Greta district by NRE as part of the statewide Effective Dairy Effluent project.

From there, with practical and commonsense advice from project officer Scott McDonald, he had a contractor put in a two-megalitre effluent pond which can be gravitated from the dairy yard at a cost of around \$2000.

At this stage he is still planning how he will make use of the effluent once the pond fills, which is expected to take eight to 10 months.

"I'm thinking of pumping a megalitre myself onto the nearby pastures and then

having a contractor with an effluent tank come in, pump out the second megalitre and then spray it out onto the paddocks further away on the farm," says David.

He says while he's been told using the effluent on his pastures will save him in fertiliser costs this was not the main reason he has put in the new system.

"My main concern is keeping the effluent on-farm and doing the right thing by the EPA, Murray Goulburn, NRE and the environment – the whole works," he says.

However, he is keen to see how his pastures respond over the next two to three years after they have been treated with the effluent.

"I know those bits of country where the grass has never really grown well," he says. "It will be interesting to see the difference."



The Dinning's new two-megalitre effluent pond.

Mallee Sustainable Farming Project

The Mallee Sustainable Farming Project has won the prestigious BHP Billiton Landcare Research Award – presented to the most ground-breaking Landcare research project in the country. The award was presented to representatives from the project at a special ceremony at Parliament House in Canberra in late August.

The award recognises the research work that has been done by the Mallee Sustainable Farming Project in one of Australia's key agricultural regions. The project has promoted sustainable and profitable Landcare practices across the Mallee – an area of three million hectares and over 1500 properties.

Ron Sly from VIDA Walpeup talking to Millewa farmers about lucerne as part of a pastures farm walk.



The project was developed in 1997 out of a need to address major land degradation problems developing in the area – partially due to the wind erosion that blights the Mallee.

Landcare leader praises project

Landcare Australia's Chief Executive, Brian Scarsbrick, said the project is very impressive.

"The Mallee is – as everyone knows – not an easy place to farm. Periodically it flares up to become one of the hot spots for dust storms. To control soil erosion and dust in this area really does require remarkably high levels of management expertise.

"This project has Landcare running through its veins. What it has been about is helping farmers turn problems around and hooking them up so they can see other people are fighting the battles and

that there is help out there. This is the strength of the Landcare movement."

According to Gill Stewart, Extension Leader for the project, the aim of the research is to help farmers with good Landcare practices so that they can achieve sustainable and profitable farming.

"We believe these two things go hand in hand together. Our project also wanted to create a strong valuable network for farmers to be part of. If people communicate more and have similar interests and similar needs, a lot is achieved," said Gill.

A framework for positive change

The project is implementing Kolb's Action Learning Framework to encourage people to feel they can be a part of setting the direction for current and future research, development and extension activities to be undertaken.

Chris McDonough of PIRSA Rural Solutions taking soil samples with the Loxton Mallee Sustainable Farming Group.

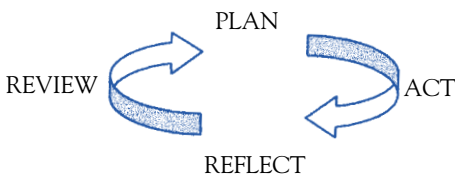


– the best in the field



Gill Stewart believes participation and input from the Mallee farming community is critical if the project is serious about creating a sense of ownership and real understanding of the information the project is generating.

“This action learning process harnesses the knowledge and experience of all stakeholder groups at each stage of the cycle, to develop relevant and targeted activities and achieve desired outcomes.



A critical success factor of action learning requires stakeholders to appreciate the value of an individuals' experience to shape project direction.

“Encouraging interaction and exchange of knowledge between participants will enable consolidation of project priorities regarding farming system issues, decision-making processes, community interaction and current innovation or on-farm trials. Ownership of the project then becomes real and holistic and we can develop a shared vision of where we want to head with confidence.”

Gill believes that there are huge gains to be made by using participatory approaches to facilitate learning, empowerment and more purposeful decision making.

The Mallee Sustainable Farming Project is currently working on the following issues: declining productivity of medic pastures; profitable crop rotations; soil water management; identification of sub-soil characteristics and management options for Mallee soils; crop nutrition; targeted input options; and deep soil nitrogen monitoring.



Gary Doyle from the Mallee Sustainable Farming Project accepting the BHP Billiton Landcare Research Award from Federal Minister Warren Truss, Melinda Buckland from BHP Billiton and John Claringbould, Chairman of Landcare Australia Limited.

Five pieces of advice for grower groups just starting out on a research project

By Gill Stewart, Mallee Sustainable Farming Project

1. Do a solid background review of what has been done prior to the commencement of a new project. Consolidate past relevant experience so that the foundations for the new project incorporate previous outcomes achieved and learnings. It will also help identify, more clearly, gaps in knowledge and processes, opportunities and effective and efficient resource allocation and direction.
2. Expectations must be clearly understood by all stakeholder groups. It is important to ensure that an honest, facilitated discussion is undertaken to identify and document the expectations of stakeholder groups.
3. Acknowledge the value of experiential learning as a suitable way of developing a shared understanding of where things are at. Encouraging interaction and exchange of knowledge will enable the project to consolidate and prepare a baseline that highlights current farming practices, farming system issues, current decision-making processes, community interaction, current innovation or on-farm trials and external impacts. Ownership then becomes real and a holistic and shared vision of where the project wants to head can then be developed with confidence.
4. Define what an outcome may be – encouraging lateral thinking, otherwise traditional research processes become a comfortable and known path of action. Try not to be caught up on only what is to be achieved in 3-5 years. This period may really be a component of a larger ongoing picture that will always require reflection and review to stay aligned with long-term sustainable practice.
5. Ask honest and sometimes difficult questions to help plan well. I believe it is critical to spend time early on sorting out some of the less tangible issues that need to be considered. Sometimes the extra time taken to discuss the people issues will prove worthwhile in the longer term rather than the traditional need for prompt action to make us feel like we are getting somewhere.

Nature Park research ejects

The red fox was introduced to Phillip Island in 1908 and has had a devastating effect on the island's wildlife. Foxes are the main land-based threat to the famous little penguins, they kill hundreds of short-tailed shearwaters each year and have contributed to the decline of the threatened hooded plover. Foxes also cause problems for other wildlife on the island, as well as for agriculture.

In the 1980s the Phillip Island Nature Park started a fox control program to protect the penguins and other wildlife. The program uses numerous techniques – treadle snaring, spotlight shooting, hunting with foxhounds, den fumigation and 1080 baiting.

Control efforts and catch rates steadily increased and, since 1995, at least 50 foxes have been killed annually. Although the number of foxes killed each year is getting less, which suggests that the population is decreasing, the current techniques alone are unlikely to lead to eradication. In an effort to accelerate the eradication of foxes from Phillip Island, the Nature Park investigated a new control technique – mechanical ejectors.

Mechanical ejectors are spring-activated devices with a bait that are buried in the ground. The fox smells the bait and digs it up. As the fox pulls on the bait, a spring is released propelling the contents of a poison capsule into the fox's mouth.

Quite a strong pull is required to trigger the device so small animals can chew on the bait but don't have the strength to trigger the device and release the poison. Also, when the fox pulls on the bait the poison is released instantly, so the fox cannot remove the bait without releasing the poison. This is an improvement on conventional poison baits, which foxes can remove and rebury up to 800 metres away to eat later. This reburying of baits



Changing the bait on an ejector. Note the required safety equipment: overalls, gloves and respirator.

is potentially dangerous to domestic and native animals who may find and eat them.

A community research project

With a grant from the Natural Heritage Trust, the Nature Park began a joint project with the Victorian Institute of Animal Science to trial the use of mechanical ejectors on Phillip Island. The project was designed to be community based, with assistance from the Phillip Island Landcare Group and other volunteers from community groups on the island.

Moragh Mackay, the Phillip Island Landcare Co-ordinator, assisted in contacting landholders and arranging visits to those who were interested in

participating and having ejectors used on their properties. Landcare members and other community group members assisted the project by allowing access to their properties and checking sites for fox activity prior to deploying ejectors. The ejectors are currently classed as a research tool, with their use governed by strict permits and safety procedures, so only Nature Park staff were allowed to deploy ejectors and check them.

Phillip Island farmer and Landcare member, Gary Cleeland, was keen to be involved in the project as he has seen first-hand the devastation foxes can cause to his new-born lambs. Although foxes were often in the area, as was evident from their tracks, unfortunately the ejectors were not successful on Gary's property. However, landholders Jim McFee and Don Dixon had more success, with a fox being killed on both of their properties.

Despite the lack of success on Gary Cleeland's property, he fully supports the program.

"Fox control is an ongoing challenge, we need to try every available technique. On Phillip Island fox control is restricted by urban development so new techniques are vital for ongoing control," said Gary.

Ejectors prove safe and efficient

The ejectors were trialled for a 15-month period which started in October 2000. They were deployed island-wide at over 55 sites on the Nature Park and private property, with landholders being extremely helpful in providing access. To inform people about the project, posters were put up around the island and articles were published in the local newspapers as well as Landcare and community group newsletters.

Care was always taken to make sure that the sites chosen for ejector deployment

Phillip Island foxes



By Marjolein van Polanen Petel



Kellie Nichols, Community Pest Plant and Animal Officer, with landholder Gary Cleeland and his son near a site on the Cleeland's property where ejectors were laid.

would not be found by dogs and cats, as they could potentially trigger the ejectors, and also curious people who may not have seen the posters or read the articles.

The technique worked very successfully, killing 11 foxes – 17% of all foxes killed on the island over that period. Equal numbers of males and females were killed, with slightly more younger foxes being killed than adults, which is typical of most fox control techniques.

No other animals were killed by the ejectors. Rats and ravens occasionally ate the baits off the ejectors, but they didn't trigger them and weren't harmed.

The results of the project will contribute to the registration of the technique so that in the future landholders can deploy ejectors on their property.

The project was awarded the Victorian Coastal Award for Excellence 2002 in the category of Innovation and, after researching the technique and following its success, the ejectors were incorporated into the fox control program on Phillip

Island and have so far killed another two foxes.

For further information contact Phillip Island Nature Park on 5951 2800.

Fox prints around a triggered mechanical ejector.



On the road with the Munro Land

The Princes Highway carries around 4000 vehicles per day between Bairnsdale and Stratford in east Gippsland. The road reserve is home to the threatened Gippsland Plains Grassy Woodland and the dominant eucalypt in the area is Forest Red Gum (*Eucalyptus tereticornis*), which suffers from severe dieback along much of the highway. A great deal of the understorey in the area is Burgan (*Kunzea ericoides*) which provides ideal habitat for rabbits, along with the sandy soils that are perfect for warrens.

The Munro Landcare Group had been concerned about the rabbit infestation for a long time, but had put the problem in the too-hard basket. When you combine a busy road with a threatened vegetation community, it becomes difficult to work out how to control rabbits without causing risk to the public or damaging vegetation. Vic Roads are unable to use 1080 poison on the road reserve as it poses a high

public liability risk for accidental poisoning of non-target animals such as domestic pets.

In late 2000, the Munro Landcare Group decided to approach NRE and Vic Roads for help. The approach brought about a joint program between Vic Roads, NRE, Parks Victoria, Landcare and landholders which has made a huge improvement to this busy stretch of the Princes Highway.

A partnership approach

As a result of a night survey with local landholders, NRE wild dog trapper Pete Lee and Catchment Management Officer Rick Lawson concluded that rabbit numbers were high and a plan was needed to reduce the numbers quickly.

After some thought, Rick Lawson came up with the novel idea of laying 1080 carrot trails on private land adjoining the Princes Highway. This would avoid the

risk of liability, while still targeting the rabbits on the road reserve that were moving into the neighbouring private land and causing problems.

Vic Roads agreed to pay for the carrots and poisons, while NRE agreed to lend bait layers, cut and poison the carrots and supervise the bait laying. All the 16 landholders along the southern section of the Princes Highway from Providence Ponds to the Stratford Highway Park and some of the landholders along the northern section were contacted and were willing to participate in the program by laying the baits on their property. A Landcare meeting was held and the dates set for the poisoning program.

In February 2001, two free feeds of carrots were given followed by a third poisoned feed. There were 1.3 tonnes of carrots used of which 300 kilograms were poisoned. In some areas 1080 couldn't be used, so Pindone oat baits were laid.

Parks Victoria also joined in and baited the western edges of the Providence Ponds Reserve adjoining private land in the area. A total of 18 kilometres of highway frontage and seven kilometres of reserve were baited during the program.

Rick Lawson supervises an excavator ripping warrens near the Princes Highway at Munro.

Rabbit warrens adjoining the Princes Highway.



care Group



By Erlina Compton

Great results

The program was a great success, with at least 70 rabbit carcasses collected. Landholders also reported a huge drop in rabbit activity around the highway.

In order to ensure that a range of control techniques were utilised and that rabbit warrens were destroyed, Vic Roads engaged a contractor in the winter of 2001 to destroy the rabbit warrens on the road reserve by using a Rid A Rabbit device. This year Vic Roads are ripping warrens using excavators as they undertake the highway upgrade works. All of this work was sensitive to the native vegetation in the area.

The landholders who participated in the program, Vic Roads, Parks Victoria and NRE staff got together after the program to debrief and celebrate the success, as well as make use of the great barbecue facilities at the Munro Hall.

Munro Landcare member, Marvin Dunsmuir, said this had been one of the greatest things to happen in the district. He praised the support from all involved



Rick Lawson cuts carrots with landholders for the program.

and said that rabbit numbers are now as low as he could remember.

More groups involved

Due to the program's success, the baiting was repeated in March 2002 and extended further east, incorporating four additional landholders and involving the Tom's Creek Landcare Group. There are now approximately 8500 hectares under control through 1080 baiting and 35 kilometres of roadside reserve treated by fumigation.

The success of the Munro program has inspired the Longford & Districts Landcare Group to team up with Vic Roads, NRE and the Wellington Shire Council to undertake a similar program adjoining roadsides in the Longford area. Longford is just south of Sale on the South Gippsland Highway. Like Munro,

Longford experiences high rabbit numbers due to the sandy soils and presence of Burgan. This program has to be tackled in a slightly different way, as the area is made up of many small landholdings based in rural residential allotments.

The Landcare group have conducted a mail survey of all the properties in the area, asking landholders to indicate if they have a rabbit problem and if they would be interested in being involved in a program. The feedback has been positive and the group have identified a zone to target.

Rick Lawson is involved in determining where 1080 can be used. (Where it is unsuitable Pinzone oat baits will be laid.) Once again Vic Roads will fund the program, with the Wellington Shire also becoming involved and targeting non-declared roads in the program.

Both of these programs will be ongoing and we hope to maintain the strong partnerships created between the various organisations and the community. This type of joint program proves that with just a bit of organisation and planning, pooling resources and working across both public and private boundaries we can achieve a great deal for all involved.

For further information contact Erlina Compton on 5147 0852.



Munro landholders filling in paperwork and collecting carrots.

SUGAR GUM – from firewood to flooring

By Mal Brown

Milling of Sugar Gum sawlogs at Black Forest Timber Mill, Woodend.

Early results from a CSIRO processing trial to produce high value products from plantation-grown Sugar Gum (*Eucalyptus cladocalyx*) are good news for the future of this hardwood species.

The trial of 40 and 100-year-old Sugar Gum logs from a NRE plantation has been instigated by the West RFA Sawlog Farming Project, a Victorian Government initiative facilitating the growing and management of native hardwoods on previously cleared agricultural land for sawlog production.

Diane Tregoning, a member of the West RFA Sawlog Farming Project Steering Committee and General Manager of Black Forest Timbers near Woodend, says the early trial results should help plantation Sugar Gum to throw off its firewood only reputation once and for all.

“It is likely that plantation Sugar Gum has an exciting future as flooring, furniture timber, outdoor decking and outdoor furniture,” says Diane.

Black Forest Timbers is a major supplier of Messmate timber products and a keen participant in the Sugar Gum trial.

Research trial leader, Dr Russell Washusen from the CSIRO Division of Forestry and Forest Products, says 30 trees were selected for the trial. The trees are from the Majorca Plantation Forest near Maryborough.

According to Russell, 15 of the original trees, which are more than 100 years

old, have produced butt logs up to 60 centimetres in diameter. The butt log is the part of the tree from which most sawn timber is recovered. The other 15 trees felled for the trial have grown from coppicing, following harvesting for firewood 40 years ago.

“Overall the results are encouraging, with an estimated recovery of between 40 and 50% from each sawlog. More importantly, there are very few knots and virtually no defects in the timber. One of the advantages of Sugar Gums is their great capacity to self-prune (shed branches) and we expect the logs from the Majorca Plantation to achieve a green recovery of sawn product similar to those from native forests.”

Russell admits that Sugar Gum has its challenges. It has a relatively high density and extractives content, making it difficult to glue with typical commercial adhesives. As part of the trial, gluing research will be conducted at CSIRO’s Clayton laboratories.

The project also involves monitoring the drying of sawn product from green to 10% moisture content and studying the extent of drying degrade. Effective drying strategies will be recommended and estimates made on the likely recovery rates of kiln-dried product.

Keith Reeves, Operations Manager at the Black Forest Sawmill, is responsible for all post-harvest handling.

Black Forest Timbers has used Australian technology to build a state-of-the-art drying sawdust fired steam generator and two large German-built pre-drying facilities that hold up to 300 cubic metres of drying timber.

The Sugar Gum processing trial is due for completion in April 2003. For more information on the trial contact Russell Washusen on 9545 2173. For information on the West RFA Sawlog Farming Project contact Steve Page on 9412 4330.

Keith Reeves with Sugar Gum sawlogs ready for milling.



Murrayville community plants the missing link

By Glennis McKee and Kerrie Price

Over 200 enthusiastic school children from Murrayville and Underbool recently joined with 180 community members from across the Mallee for a massive Murrayville planting day.

The event came together after several months of planning by the Murrayville VFF/Landcare Group and the Mallee CMA. Murrayville VFF/Landcare President Kevin Chaplin and Bathurst champion Larry Perkins officially opened the day. Larry Perkins grew up on a property near Cowangie and has been a strong supporter of the project.

More than 4000 trees were guarded and 300 tubestock planted – the final link in a corridor linking the Murray Sunset National Park and the Big Desert. The project now includes over 200 kilometres of roadside revegetation established by direct seeding and tubestock planting.

One of the greatest challenges faced by Landcare groups in the Mallee region is establishing revegetation in such dry conditions. Kym Kindon, who was employed by the Murrayville VFF/Landcare Group to carry out the on-ground works, believes the key to success is good ground preparation.

The last piece in the puzzle. The recently planted link between Murrayville North Road and the Murray Sunset National Park.

“Early ground preparation ensures that by the time of planting, rainfall, even when minimal, has been captured in furrows and rip lines and provides good sub-soil moisture for plant establishment.

“The long-term benefits of direct seeding alongside tubestock planting are also evident in the Mallee, as seed will often sit dormant for several months until the conditions are most favourable for germination.”

The activities in the Murrayville area are part of the Recreating the Links project, funded by the Natural Heritage Trust Bushcare Program. The project involves on-ground works on ten separate linkages throughout the southern Mallee and will reconnect three major national parks and flora and fauna reserves, as well as a number of smaller bushland reserves and private land remnants.



Morgan Chaplin shows her grandmother, Dorothy Brown, how to guard a tree.

The project has been supported by local politician Russell Savage, MLA, as well as the Governor of Victoria, Mr John Landy, who visited one of the planting sites earlier this year and met with local landholders and members of the community.

The Murrayville planting day also had a strong educational focus. Young planters spent time with representatives from Mildura Rural City Council, Parks Victoria, NRE and Greening Australia looking at flora, fauna and park management issues.

The day demonstrated that community spirit and support is still strong in the Mallee and that when we work together we can make things happen.

For further information contact Murrayville VFF/Landcare Co-ordinator Glennis McKee on 5095 2363 and Bushcare Project Officer Kerrie Price on 5092 1322.



William Hannah teaching the children about indigenous culture in the Mallee. A demonstration on the didgeridoo was one of the highlights of the day.