



Australian Government
Land & Water Australia

Natural. Passion.

INSPIRING STORIES OF PRACTICAL SUSTAINABILITY





FOREWORD

A casual skim through the media at the supermarket checkout or a glance at the nightly news would suggest we live in an era characterised both by huge geopolitical and environmental issues over which we as individuals have seemingly little control, and by superficial celebrity that promotes and insults people with whom we have little in common.

The net result of these phenomena can be the feeling that ordinary people don't matter, and can do little that will make a difference to the big shapers of our world and the future for our kids and their descendants.

This great little book gives the lie to such feelings.

It tells the extraordinary stories of ordinary people – people unheard of on the national or international stage – who have made a big difference to the world around them.

These are the stories of the Community Fellows, people chosen and supported by Land & Water Australia with the generous support of the Poola and Dara Foundations in recognition of their personal achievements and the potential of their unsung stories to inform and inspire others.

There is a tendency to think about big environmental issues – like the greenhouse effect, salinity, declining water quality or loss of biodiversity – in the aggregate, and to map them at continental scale and calculate their total cost to the nation or the globe. Such aggregation tends to disconnect them from the countless individual decisions and actions that have created them, making it seem like a government problem, or at least someone else's problem.

Yet environmental problems are the aggregate and cumulative result of lots and lots of everyday decisions and actions by individual people, families, businesses and communities. This means that, ultimately, the best way to fix environmental problems is to influence those ordinary, everyday decisions and actions.

Renowned anthropologist Margaret Mead put it well:

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

The people whose stories emerge so vibrantly from these pages have already changed their worlds. They have created lasting legacies in their communities and their landscapes. They have worked over many years – decades in some cases – to fix up environmental problems or to develop new and better ways of living with the land. Some have worked alone, many have led their communities, all have inspired others.

There are lessons for all of us here. Sprinkled throughout these stories are gems of hard won, grounded wisdom and insight that should be of interest to anyone wanting to improve their local environment.

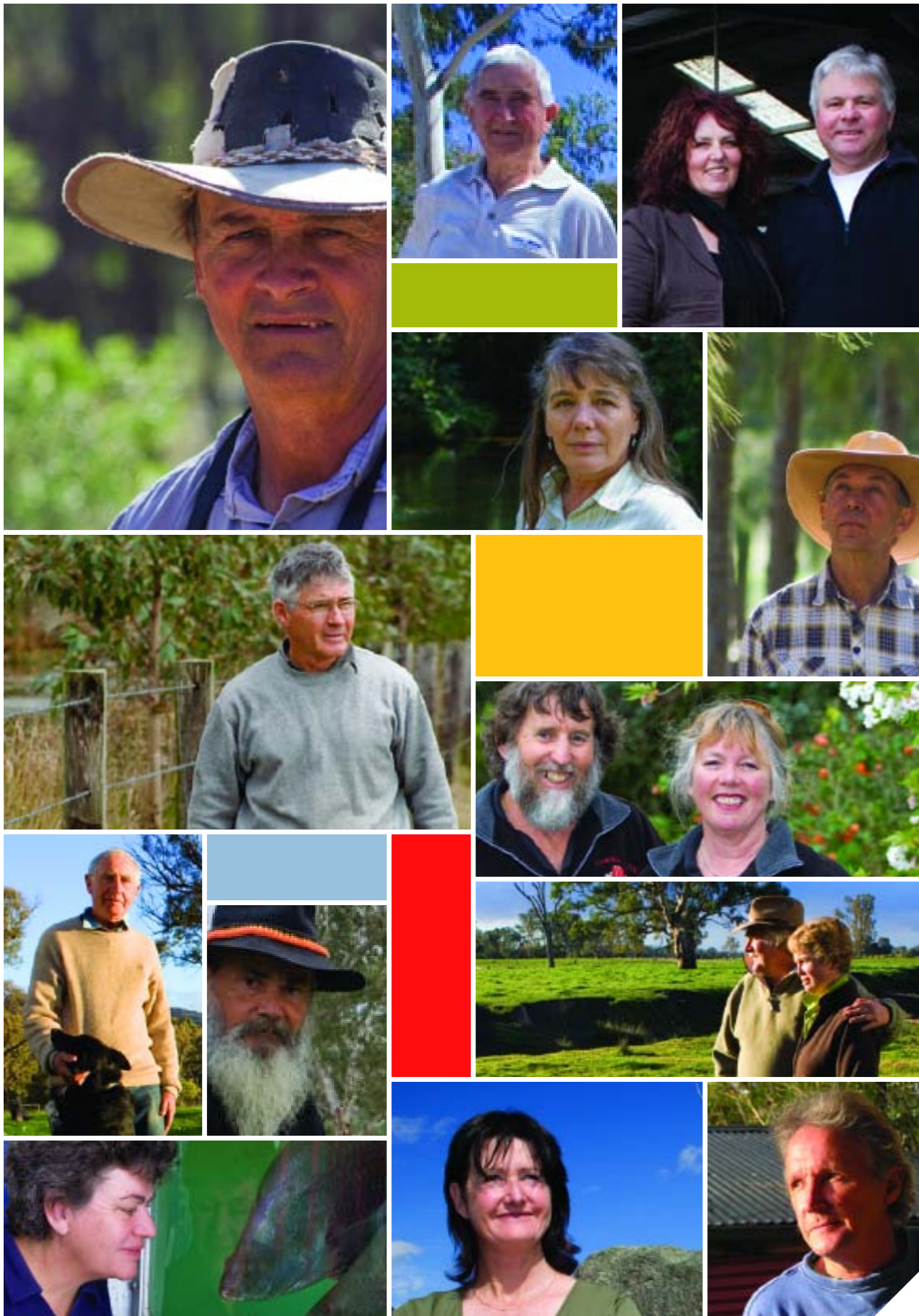
There are great characters here, fascinating stories and compelling lessons.

Sadly, such stories rarely make it into the magazines at the check-out aisles.

But fortunately, and thanks to the foresight and great generosity of the Poola and Dara Foundations, this compilation shows how so-called ordinary people can change the world.

Andrew Campbell
Executive Director
Land & Water Australia
2000-2006





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Native species revegetation is an integral part of the Gondwana Link program.



Keith Bradby, at a newly replanted site near Albany, WA.

“Environmentalism in the early 1980s was largely dominated by urban, middle-class people. But I was living in a town of 300 to 400 people; we were fighting each other in the media and then going out and fighting bushfires together and sending our kids to the same schools. You get to respect each other and know each other as human beings and not as stereotypes, as greenies or rednecks or whatever.” - Keith Bradby

Mutual respect the key to saving and restoring bush in the wild south-west

Keith Bradby is a Ballarat boy who 30 years ago packed himself off to Western Australia to make an honest living in the bush as a beekeeper. He felt an immediate affinity with the big open spaces of the south-west, with its awe-inspiring expanses of wildflower heaths; remarkable for their ability to withstand both the icy winds howling in from Antarctica and the hot breath of desert brandishing down from the north.

It wasn't long before the new kid in Ravensthorpe found himself drawn to the front line of the State's environmental movement.

“They started knocking down the bush around where I

lived - it was 1979,” Keith recalls. “Just as I was getting to know more about the ecological richness of Western Australia, the Government launched its ‘up to 3,000,000 hectares of land to be cleared for agriculture’ program. It started on some mega-diverse rocky hills only a few kilometres from my property and it was just such madness that we threw everything into stopping it, which we did.

“Since then I've been intimately tied to the environmental issues of agriculture and land clearing, landcare and landscape restoration.”

From 1985 onwards Keith worked with individual farmers and farmer groups on local enterprise development programs, which included establishing native plant based enterprises and perennial grazing systems. This led to his being employed by the Agriculture Minister to assist with special projects linked to landcare and sustainability.

For four years he took on the role of co-ordinating the Peel-Harvey Catchment Program, using his practical and personal skills to draw together individuals and groups in implementing a co-operative and pioneering approach to successfully managing the estuary and its catchment.

In 1996 Keith became a Department of Agriculture Policy Officer in its Sustainable Rural Development Program.

“I accepted the role on the specific understanding that I would work on strengthening the regulatory process and legislative controls to protect native vegetation,” Keith said. “I also worked to establish innovative programs such as ‘Bush Brokers’ and ‘Bush Bank’, which attract private funding for bushland conservation, in ways that also benefit farmers.”

Keith says he has learnt the importance of tackling the big environmental issues through broad community involvement.

“Looking back over the last 25 years I think one of the most important things I did was move pretty swiftly from the antagonistic, polarising approaches needed in the early 1980s. This meant that I could work co-operatively with some of the very farmers who had been pretty upset with me; we started repairing the land that had been cleared and working together in ways that took into account the area's ecological values.

“One of the most gobsmackingly impressive things I've seen in my life is the way farmers in this part of the world came here to clear their land and worked their guts out for

10, 20 years doing just that, and then realised there were problems with what they'd done and so set about starting to address those problems. There's been a phenomenal turnaround by a number of very magnificent individuals.”

These days Keith is co-ordinator of Gondwana Link, a monumental project, the dream of which has been close to his heart for 20 years.

“If you look at a satellite photo of south-western Australia (one of Australia's biodiversity hotspots) most of it is gone – 22,000,000 hectares have been almost totally obliterated,” Keith explained. “The Gondwana Link vision is (through covenants, strategic land purchase, ecological plantings and ongoing conservation-based land management) to protect all that is left and restore the ecological connections across the major climatic and ecological gradients of south-western Australia, from the mallee east of the agricultural belt, through the Fitzgerald River area to the Stirling Ranges and wet forests.”

Keith was awarded a Community Fellowship in 2004 to enable him to put together a booklet telling his 25-year story, *The Journey from Saving to Restoring Bush in South-Western Australia 1979 – 2005*.

“I think it's immensely important that we all get a chance to reflect on what we're doing and share those reflections so that others don't have to keep reinventing the wheel,” Keith said. “And I feel very privileged that this Fellowship has helped me to do just that.”

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Visit: www.gondwanalink.org

Visit: www.bushbrokers.com.au

Visit: www.heritagewa.org.au/naturalheritage/bushbank



John Stockard, Wingham NSW.



Wingham Brush.

“There was this luxuriant vista of exotic vegetation swamping through everything. Bougainvilleas, coral trees and jacarandas had been planted there for so-called beautification and the cat’s claw creeper when it was in bloom was a spectacular cover of yellow flowers. So it was quite a glorious colourful thing that we hacked into!”- John Stockard

The Battle for Wingham Brush

Pioneering rainforest regeneration in Australia

Shortly after graduating as a dentist in California, 23-year-old John Stockard followed his Australian girlfriend to Sydney. The trip changed his life and marked the start of not one, but two lasting love affairs.

“We visited Steph’s parents who had retired to Taree (on the Manning River in NSW) and they drove me around the district,” John said. “At Wingham I was amazed by the giant fig trees and flying foxes right in the middle of the town. It looked like a childhood dream come true. I’d always wanted to go to a rainforest area, somewhere that was wet, exotic and luxuriant. When I saw the Wingham Brush I thought, ‘this is a place to remain’.”

Stephanie and John married in 1975 and purchased a run-down dental practice in Wingham. Two children and more than 30 years later they are still there.

John had studied biology at university and had a keen interest in natural history. So, in 1980, when Stephanie heard the National Trust was calling for volunteers to save

the Wingham Brush she put John’s name forward. He became a volunteer supervisor of a team of six in what was the first attempt to restore a degraded rainforest in Australia.

“This is one of the few remnants (9 hectares) of lowland floodplain subtropical rainforest in NSW,” John said. “It had become obvious it was dying. The trees were collapsing under a blanket of exotic vines, which smothered most of the rainforest canopy and posed a major threat to the site’s conservation.”

Over the next 16 years John led the team in pioneering new techniques of using herbicides and formulated a radical new method for restoring rainforests, the ‘Wingham Brush Method’.

Locally, the project became known as ‘The Battle for the Brush’, for more reasons than one.

The only program of bush regeneration approved by the National Trust at the time was the Bradley Method, which

involved a ground approach of well organised hand-weeding.

“It was mainly based on work the Trust had done in sandstone country around Sydney; this was the first time they tried to apply it to a rainforest,” John said.

“But primarily ours was a vine problem – the whole canopy was enveloped by these enormous South American cat’s claw creeper vines and the root systems were such that there was no way you could dig them out. They had a series of tubers about every half a metre and every tuber created a radiation of growth until you had a fishing net layer over the whole system. The tree trunks were sometimes so covered with cat’s claw stems that you couldn’t see the bark of the host tree. And then we worked into areas dominated by an infestation of potato vine (also known as jalap or madeira vine), a fleshy sort of horrendous vine with a weaker root system but an incredible weight that smothered everything else.”

John says they were faced with a choice – give up and go home, or develop their own techniques involving the selective (and controversial) use of herbicides.

Without using a trans-locative selective herbicide like Roundup (glyphosate), we couldn’t even begin,” John said. “There was no way we could have controlled the cat’s claw creeper and its root system without it.”

On another front, the project team had to cope with criticism from within the Wingham community. With the Brush being right in the middle of a residential area there was a lot of concern from people who, according to John, “might have grown their chokos in there or collected pecan nuts from a tree that was there, or whose grandfather had planted that giant bamboo that was being dozed out”.

“There were very mixed feelings, indeed, because this luxuriant green thing turned brown and dead looking as we

killed off all the weeds (which were most of the vegetation), and a lot of people got rather upset until the new vegetation and the old original vegetation re-shot and started to re-establish itself.

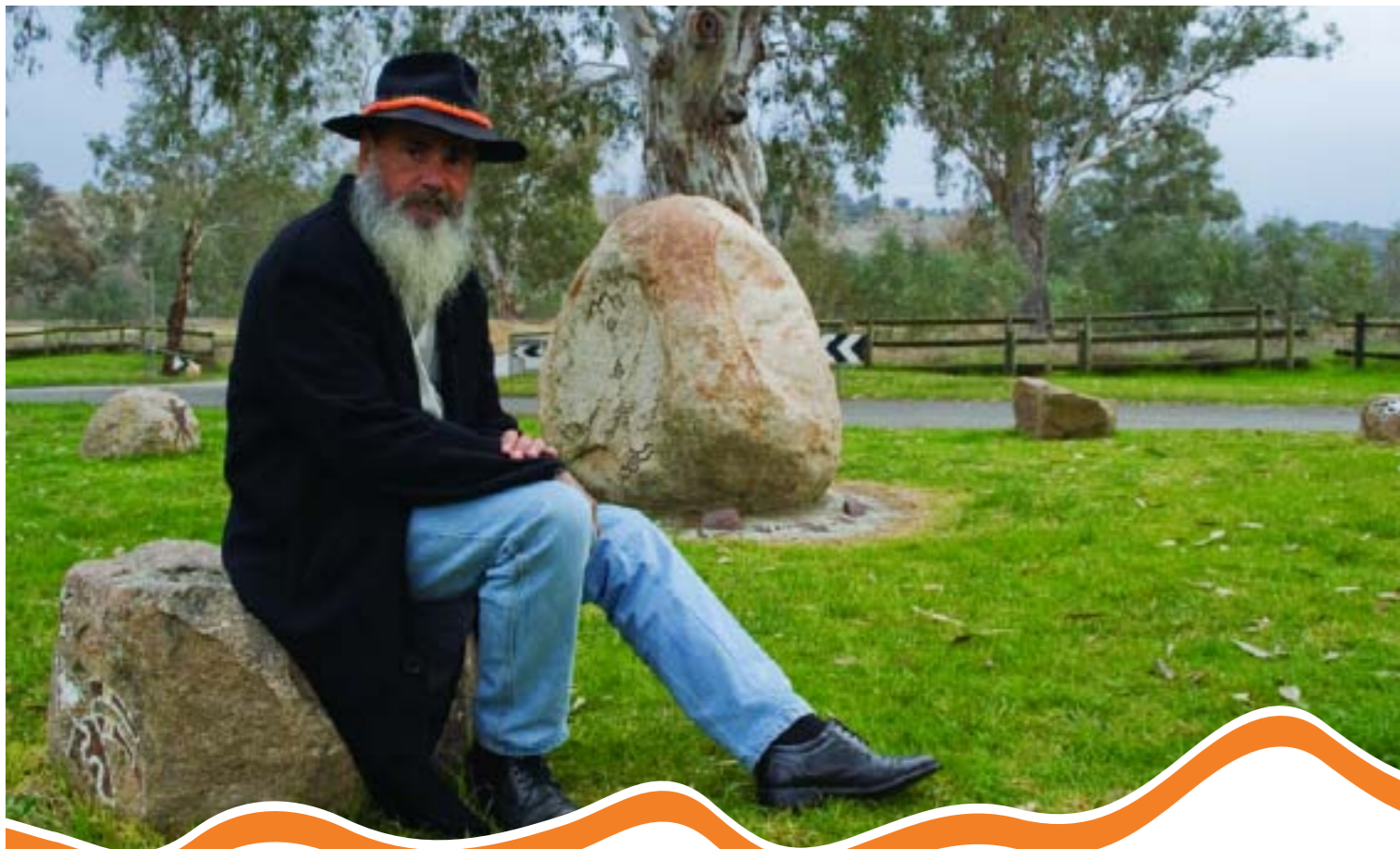
“It was an absolutely grinding program that went on year after year and for a good section of it I was wondering whether we’d ever get there. It certainly was a test of tenacity and endurance.”

But persistence paid off, with Wingham Brush eventually being given official recognition as ‘an endangered ecological community’ and, in 2000, being granted Nature Reserve status. The site is now recognised as the first scientifically assessed rainforest regeneration program in Australia and the ‘Wingham Brush Method’ is being used as the model for restoration of other important rainforest areas.

Being awarded a Community Fellowship has given John (under the guidance of socio-geographer Max Solling and Dennis Jeans, formerly a Professor of Geography at Sydney University) the opportunity to produce a booklet presenting the natural, historical and ‘human’ story behind this outstanding conservation project.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Visit: www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/PDFs/pom_final_wingham.pdf to download a copy of ‘The Wingham Brush Nature Reserve Plan of Management’.



Yalmambirra, Albury NSW.



View from Mungabareena Reserve.

“Council were very good and provided advice on how best to undertake the project and assisted with machinery and water for the plants, etc but the project was vandalised from the very beginning. The fence was cut, a gate was stolen and after repairs it was cut again and again. One time I located a section of fencing in the Murray River, about 30 metres of it, and had to drag it out.” - Yalmambirra

Rehabilitating Mungabareena ‘Place of plenty talk’ a site of much action

Yalmambirra is a Wiradjuri man from Albury in southern NSW. In 2000 he began a crusade to revegetate and rehabilitate 48 hectares of riverfront public reserve. The role of co-ordinating what became ‘The Mungabareena Reserve – Wiradjuri Reconciliation Project’ proved a difficult and often thankless task, but Yalmambirra is not a man to walk away from a challenge.

Having left school when he was 11 years old and wandering for 33 years in what he describes as an “educational wilderness”, Yalmambirra enrolled at Charles Sturt University. At age 46 he graduated with a Bachelor Degree in Applied Science (Park, Recreation & Heritage), and went on to complete a Class 1 Honours Degree. He is now doing a PhD and is employed by the University as the Koorie Academic (Wiradjuri).

Yalmambirra recalls the incident that initially sparked his

determination to put a stop to the degradation of Mungabareena (‘place of plenty talk’) Reserve.

“I was out there walking around the reserve with the senior Wiradjuri Elder here in Albury and some school kids were there having a sports day. This little girl ran behind a tree and she disappeared for about two seconds and then there was this big scream – she’d come face to face with a very large cow. This isn’t right, we thought, this is a reserve, this is for people, not cattle.

“There was only one green area where people could enjoy recreational pastimes. The rest of the reserve was weed infested and there was no chance of the regrowth of any of the native vegetation such as the river red gums. The area has a number of wetland areas in it and these were very, very degraded and the water was just absolutely black from cattle use.”

After consulting with a number of people, including a senior Wiradjuri Elder, Yalmambirra decided to apply to the Natural Heritage Trust for funding so the area could be revegetated and rehabilitated.

“The success of the application meant a fence could be erected that would keep the cattle out so that the planting process could be undertaken without the cattle eating the plants before they had a chance of growing,” he said. “All aspects of the project were to be undertaken on a voluntary basis.”

As soon as the fence was erected it was vandalised, and as soon as it was repaired it was vandalised again. And again and again.

Down but not out, Yalmambirra continued to lobby support from Albury City Council and, eventually, it decided not to renew the livestock agistment leases. The fence, no longer necessary, was dismantled.

“A total of 11,400 plants, indigenous to the area, were planted by volunteers from the community and from local schools, the university and other organisations,” he said.

Then the vandalism began again. The picnic tables started to get stolen, plants were stolen or destroyed and signs were torn down and run over.

Far from giving up, “it just made me want to work harder,” Yalmambirra said.

Two steps forward, one back, still equals progress and slowly the rehabilitation of Mungabareena Reserve continued.

“Council has recently received some funding to complete the project,” Yalmambirra said. “Walking tracks will be redeveloped, and weed eradication and general maintenance of the project area are some of the ways in which this

money will be used. It’s also envisaged that another two green areas will be developed so that we can provide the community with additional recreational spaces.

“My message to people who are undertaking something similar would be to consult with everybody and endeavour to give ownership of the project to the community. If they feel that they have ownership of it then they’ll participate at a higher level. Also, you need to factor in the long-term needs of the project. It’s okay to turn around and say ‘we’ll get \$25,000 and go out and do this, that and the other’, but someone’s got to look after it after you leave.”

Yalmambirra says his Community Fellowship enabled him to speak about the project at a number of conferences around Australia. “Many people I met had experienced the same problems that I’d encountered so the exchange of information was really useful in helping us to see where things could be improved to provide better outcomes,” he said.

“On a personal level, being awarded the Fellowship was one of the major highlights in my short career at university and my involvement in environmental issues. The Fellowship lifted my self esteem to another level and provided me with the opportunity to meet and speak with people from all over the country; people who I may have never met otherwise.”



Carolyn Daniel, Jerramungup WA.

'Been there and done that'

Landcare Coordinator brings passion to her role as mentor

Carolyn Daniel was one of the first Community Landcare Coordinators in Western Australia and is one of the longest serving in Australia. Back in 1990, with no formal environmental qualifications but an immense passion for planting trees, Carolyn began her career with the Jerramungup Landcare Group and over the following 12 years was at the forefront of an on-farm revolution in the district.

"Up until the 1980s Jerramungup was notorious for wind erosion and through a steady process of education and demonstration our Landcare Group helped bring about an almost total change in tillage practices," Carolyn said. "Today, in excess of 95% of this district practices reduced tillage."

Carolyn's work as a Landcare Coordinator also involved mapping: "I did cartography courses and was mapping for the group until 2002. We had a really sophisticated mapping system, one of the best in Australia at the time, and 80% of the district got mapped in a farm planning project."

As a partner with her husband in her own mixed farming operation, one of Carolyn's strengths has been her ability to relate well with other landholders and to imbue them with her enthusiasm for natural resource management.

"I like people and a big component of my job was motivating people and communicating at a grassroots level," she said. "I just loved going onto farms, seeing what other people were doing and seeing the changes taking place."

"Having come from interstate, I was, and still am, in awe of the environment over here and amazed at the biodiversity. Where we came from originally, the Adelaide Plains in South Australia, we only had starlings, sparrows, galahs and crows. Here we had about six different species of parrots and five species of wild ducks as well as 12 different species of native orchids on our property – all of these things are just fantastic."

In addition to her role as a Landcare Coordinator, Carolyn was a founding member of the dynamic South Coast Regional Initiative Planning Team Inc. (SCRIPT). As honorary treasurer from 1995-2000, she managed the organisation's million-dollar budget and a staff of eight people.

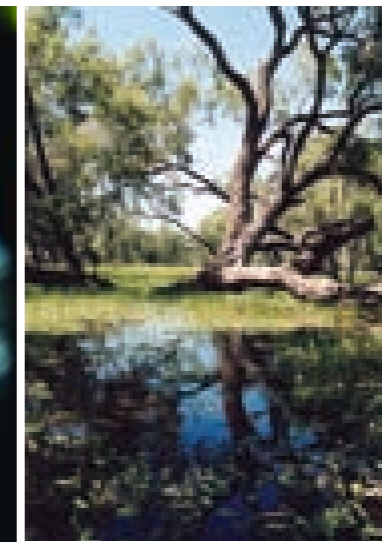
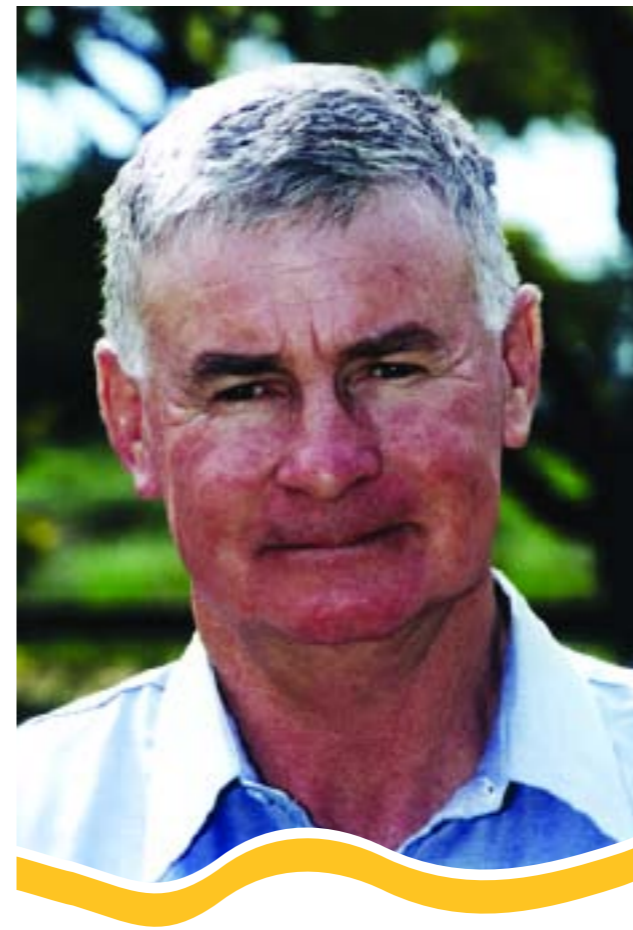
In 2003, assisted by a Community Fellowship grant, Carolyn set up a home-based consultancy and through this continued to mentor Landcare Coordinators and community groups in developing and managing their own projects.

Recently, Carolyn was lured back to the Landcare fold to take up a new challenge as the South Coast National Landcare Program's Regional Community Landcare Co-ordinator.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Visit: www.script.asn.au

Visit: www.landcareonline.gov.au



LEFT: Eric Fisher, Quambone NSW. Photo courtesy of Eric Fisher. ABOVE: Wilgara Wetlands. Photos: Sue Jones.

Protecting Wilgara Wetlands

an upstream battle

'Wilgara' is a cattle grazing property on the eastern edge of the Macquarie Marshes in Central NSW and home to one of Australia's most significant wetland breeding sites for ibis, egrets, herons and other colonial nesting water birds.

Fortunately for the wildlife, the 1900-hectare property is owned and managed by Eric Fisher and his wife Carolyn, who since the early 1960s have been dedicated to protecting and enhancing Wilgara's environmental treasures.

In 2000 the Fishers became one of the first private landholders in Australia to list part of their property (560 hectares) as a 'wetland of international importance' under the Ramsar Convention.

"I am a strong believer in the ability to manage wetlands in a manner that enables economic sustainability while at the same time maintaining environmental integrity and this is the philosophy I use to manage 'Wilgara'," Eric said.

Eric's passionate commitment to managing and protecting significant wetlands goes beyond his own backyard. In 1967, when construction of the Burrendong Dam significantly reduced the natural water flows in the Macquarie River system, Eric began lobbying to protect the marshlands which were (and still are) in danger of drying out. In the early 1980s when irrigated cotton was introduced to the Macquarie Valley, the situation gradually worsened.

"I don't blame the irrigators in this case because it was governments that created the problem in the first place by

over allocating water licences," Eric said. "But since about 1984 the quantity of water extracted has caused the marshes to shrink to a stage where now, with the added impact of six years of drought, there has been untold damage done to the area."

While Eric serves on numerous committees at local, regional and State level, working to raise awareness of the importance and the fragility of, not only the Macquarie Marshes, but endangered wetlands throughout NSW, he laments what he suspects is a lack of political will to take the hard decisions.

"But it's not much use to stay out here and just moan and groan," Eric said. "We try to focus on some of the positives that are coming through from some sections of the government and work with these people and help them to see the other side of the coin, as it were."

"The Community Fellowship gave me the opportunity to get a higher profile for our case by being able to attend conferences and workshops and talk to other landholders in three States and two Territories. I have also been able to form 'The Private Ramsar Managers Forum', which has subsequently been funded by the State Department of Environment and Conservation in NSW."



ABOVE: Kate Andrews, gibber plain, western Qld. Photo: Peter Morris. RIGHT: Lake Eyre. BELOW RIGHT: Kate and Ned. Photo courtesy of Kate Andrews.

“Respecting what people can bring with them and being willing to build relationships and trust with people, to me is a crucial part of managing positive change. And you need to get everyone in the one tent – it’s no good if the environmentalists are outside throwing rocks! Even if people disagree they can still learn from each other and understand things from another perspective. It achieves much more than having people simply stand in four separate corners and state – or in some cases, yell – their case.” - Kate Andrews

Loose-knit outback community unites on big picture issues

Integrated catchment management in the Lake Eyre Basin

The advertisement said “swag conditions apply”. The idea of that was so appealing to environmental scientist Kate Andrews that she immediately put up her hand for the job, got it, packed a few essentials including Ned her stumpy-tailed blue heeler and set course from Canberra for one of Australia’s most isolated, and magnificent, regions, the Lake Eyre Basin.

Over the next four and a half years, from 1996 to 2000, having settled into a tiny town 20 minutes out of Longreach, Kate’s knowledge of natural resource management and

community processes was put to the test. And so were her inherent skills as a diplomat.

She had a lot of ground to cover – Lake Eyre Basin is about the same size as the Murray-Darling Basin. It stretches across 1.2 million km² of central Australia including southern NT, northern SA, western Qld and a small patch of NSW.

As Project Officer for the Lake Eyre Basin Steering Committee, with the goal of seeking community participation in determining the future management of the region’s natural

resources, Kate’s initial focus was on helping break down the communication barriers and entrenched “fear and antagonism” that existed between various stakeholders groups.

“To get people to take part in the consultation process, I had to find lots of different ways of making it relevant to them,” Kate said. “Sometimes people were driven by the positives and sometimes by the negatives, the fear factors. I discovered it takes a lot of work and energy to get people to participate in something that is about bigger picture, longer-term issues.”

Kate recalled how she sometimes received help from individuals when she least expected it:

“At one of the first workshops we held, there was a pastoralist who was being very stropy and saying, ‘Why should we be involved? Are you going to give us any money to be involved? I’m not going to participate unless you pay me.’ And just as I thought, ‘I’ve lost this group, I can’t get them engaged’, this old retired drover up the back of the room stood up and said: ‘I’ve just come back from down south and I was checking out the Murray River. You should see what’s happened to those rivers down there; basically they’ve been completely stuffed. I love this country up here and I don’t want the same thing to happen. It’s up to us to make sure we don’t bugger up this country just like it’s been bugged up elsewhere in Australia.’ There was a dead silence after he spoke and you could see everyone thinking ‘He’s right, we don’t want that to happen here. We rely upon this country economically, but we also love this country’. And the whole meeting just turned around.”

The long process of consultation evolved by slow degrees into one of active participation. Representatives of pastoralists, local governments, landcare groups, mining companies, Indigenous communities, tourism operators, conservationists, scientists and government agencies began exploring and developing the options. Eventually they all gathered in the “one tent” and came to an agreement – together they would establish the Lake Eyre Basin Coordinating Group (LEBCG).



The organisation’s role would be to help identify the natural resource management issues of the vast, cross-border catchment area and to instigate a community-owned process to address them.

“As we went through this process, I was impressed by how obvious it was to everyone involved that natural resource management isn’t just about environmental

issues,” Kate said. “It’s as much about economics and people’s livelihoods, about social issues and whether you’ve got a healthy community. They truly were seeking integration in the way they wanted to proceed, and in the principles that they adopted.”

Within the LEBCG, catchment committees and sub-committees were set up to maintain momentum at a local level, which according to Kate was “an amazing way of building people’s capacity to participate in these sorts of processes, to understand other viewpoints and to deal with conflict”.

In her role as LEBCG’s Chief Executive, Kate oversaw the development of a basin-wide strategy and two catchment strategies, which were launched in late 2000 at Birdsville.



A Heads of Agreement between the South Australian, Queensland and Commonwealth governments was signed at the same time, laying the foundation for more effective co-operation at a governmental level in managing issues affecting the Lake Eyre Basin. Under this Agreement a Ministerial Forum was established with the LEBCG as its community advisory committee.

“In setting up what was really the first community designed and community established cross-border regional group, people began to see themselves as part of the catchment, part of a much bigger picture,” Kate said. “And the other important thing that happened was that they figured out ‘hey, we can do this’.

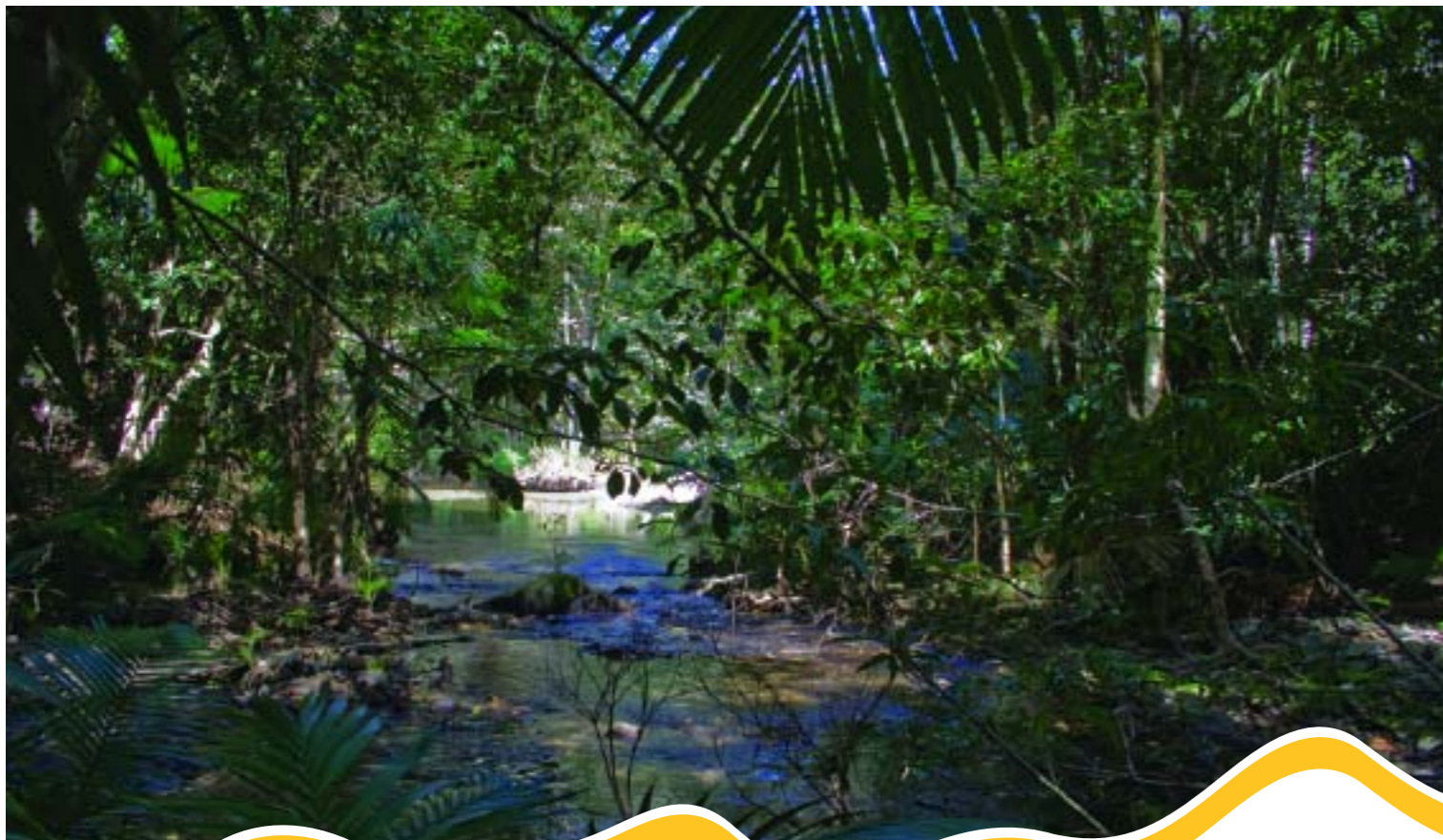
“I think the most wonderful compliment I ever had came from a remarkable woman, a pastoralist on the Birdsville Track. At the end of my time there she said to me, ‘What was so special was that you believed in us when even we didn’t’.

Kate says that being awarded a Community Fellowship enabled her to reflect on and draw lessons from her experiences in the Lake Eyre Basin – important lessons about embracing diversity, respecting local knowledge, overcoming conflict and turning talk and planning into action. And, importantly, having fun!

To communicate these lessons in a way that would reach out to and inspire a broad audience, Kate created a multimedia presentation, which featured sixteen LEBCG participants telling the story of their involvement in their own words.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Visit: www.lakeeyrebasin.org.au



Headwaters of the Mitchell River.



ABOVE: Hilary Kuhn, Julatten QLD.
BELOW: Savannah country near Mount Carbine.

“Everyone is quite passionate about the catchment itself, with regard to whatever way they’re using it, working with it. They keep a close eye on it on a daily basis, particularly the members of the Aboriginal communities. Nobody is shy at meetings because they’re strongly driven by their interest in the management of the river.” - Hilary Kuhn

Managing the Mitchell

It’s a case of sharing and caring

For 30 years Hilary Kuhn has been promoting and protecting the Mitchell River system, one of Australia’s largest and most richly diverse catchments. The vast 72,000 square kilometre area traverses lower Cape York Peninsula, from wet tropical rainforests in the east through tropical forest woodlands and across the savannah plains all the way to the spectacular delta country with its teeming wetlands fanning into the Gulf of Carpentaria.

Hilary’s former life as a Sydney journalist and university academic, combined with an abiding affection for her adopted landscape, have placed her in good stead as an advocate for sensible and sustainable use of the catchment. As well as operating an Arabian horse stud with her husband Geoffrey, Hilary works as a consultant on ecotourism planning and on delivery of regional services to indigenous communities.

Since 1998 she has chaired the Mitchell River Watershed

Management Group (MRWVG), an integrated catchment management group formed on the initiative of the Aboriginal elders at Kowanyama, a delta community of 1500 residents.

“The MRWVG was the first of its kind in Australia and continues as a strong and very inclusive group, committed and vigilant in its protection of our shared resource,” Hilary said. “Stakeholders include the Aboriginal communities, graziers, miners, fishermen, agriculturalists, environmentalists, tourism operators, local and State government representatives, and so on.

“Potentially there could be clashes between stakeholders but we’ve developed a protocol at our meetings where we agree to disagree and do not get personal about it.”

Even so, Hilary says, at times it can be quite challenging to be in the chair.

“You do have to know the people and you have to know

the different ways they express themselves. Some people get very emotional when they talk about issues but you’ve got to give them room to move, room to express themselves. I know these people just by living in the catchment for so many years so I know when to jump in at the right time.

“The way we manage threats to the catchment is often the result of innovative partnerships between stakeholders. For example, an infestation of the noxious fish tilapia was thwarted by screens in an inter-basin irrigation system, grazing impacts are managed with fencing of frontage country, and catchment-friendly techniques have been used for the rehabilitation of a large gold mine.”

Hilary’s own passion for the river country has inspired her to write a book, titled *From Rainforests to Savannah: Caring for the Mitchell River*, and illustrated by acclaimed photographer Kerry Trapnell.

“Although there is already a significant volume of material on the flora and fauna, the history, the stakeholders and catchment management, it’s never been integrated into a readily accessible publication,” she said.

“I want to present the story in a very readable and also a very visual way, through Kerry’s wonderful photography. Many people don’t realise how big the catchment is and the different types of environments that the river passes through; some residents in the headwaters tend to forget it’s a westerly flowing river and that the water they’re using is going all the way to the Gulf of Carpentaria.”

Hilary says she is grateful for the recognition and assistance provided under the Community Fellowship program.

“It has given me the financial ability to get on with the book and has also opened doors for me in dealing with publishers,” she said.





Riki Gunn at the Barramundi Discovery Centre.



Fishing is the lifeblood of Karumba.

“Recreational fishermen would come up here for a couple of weeks and want to take home a year’s supply of fish. So what I was thinking was, if we could help get the lakes around where they lived stocked up with barramundi they would have their own fishing places and there’d be less pressure on the wild catch fish, and it’s working.” - Riki Gunn

Millionaire fillets not worth the price

Natural resource management in the Gulf of Carpentaria

While hitchhiking around Australia as a free spirit in the 1970s, Adelaide girl Riki Gunn ran out of money at Karumba in the Gulf of Carpentaria and netted a job on a prawn trawler. The lifestyle suited her to a tee and she spent the next 16 years plying the waters of the Gulf, most of that time as first mate on a privately-owned trawler, which she managed with her partner Neil Tulau. Then suddenly, with one stroke of a Commonwealth Government pen, her prawning days came to a rude halt – she was stranded ashore with no job and few skills that didn’t involve navigating or mending nets.

“That government-initiated measure reduced the Northern Prawn Fisheries’ fleet by 30 per cent,” says Riki. “I realised then, that the management of natural resources needs to be

achieved from within the relevant industries in order to be accepted by them.”

Resigned to their fate, Riki and Neil opened up a small motel ‘Matilda’s End’ in Karumba.

“We got into tourism before tourism had really begun,” says Riki. “We concentrated mainly on recreational fishermen and I was absolutely horrified with the waste and the greed of many of these people. They would come with a tuckerbox freezer and fill it up with what we called ‘millionaire fillets’; that’s a fillet that’s got no bones in it and half the fish is thrown away, wasted. The whole tourism thing was just building and was based on this resource and I could see that our fishery wouldn’t last very long if it kept going like that.

So I started in various ways – local progress associations, advisory committees and so on – trying to make changes, trying to change the size limits, bag limits, attitudes and things like that.”

Riki also joined a local fingerling restocking project begun by a group of commercial barramundi fishermen.

“When I came on board it was little more than a dream and an empty block of land, which over the past 14 years we’ve built into a full-blown hatchery,” she said. “We now have fish restocking happening in all the lakes in the Southern Gulf region, including Mt Isa, Cloncurry, Richmond, Hughenden and Croydon. We also stock the Albert River at Burketown, and the Norman River at Normanton.”

To support the fingerling breeding and release project financially, Riki threw her energy into setting up a complementary Barramundi Discovery Centre.

“I figured the best way to make money is tourism. The centre is still a bit raw but it’s coming along and we’ve finally got it away from relying on volunteers such as Neil and myself. It now makes enough to pay for two employees, including a young biologist (Brett Jeffries) who’s permanently on site.”

These days Riki’s intimate knowledge of the Gulf marine environment together with her well-honed business management and leadership skills are devoted full-time to the Carpentaria Ghost Nets Program. The program is a partnership between indigenous community groups, non-government organisations and the Australian Government. On-ground clean ups are the responsibility of indigenous rangers working with communities to rid their beaches of nets.

“Ghost nets are fishing nets that have been abandoned or lost at sea,” explains Riki. “At the moment we’re cleaning up

rubbish that has accumulated on beaches over decades, to stop the nets from re-entering the sea. At the same time we’re collecting information about the nets – the different sorts of twine or mesh and colour – so that we know where they come from. We can identify about 60% of them and we know most of those are coming from SE Asia.

“This is just the sort of job I love,” adds Riki. “It’s got all the challenges I need!”

Riki was awarded a Community Fellowship in 2004 in recognition of her valuable contribution to natural resource management and to assist her in mentoring and encouraging indigenous rangers to take on more senior managerial and leadership roles within their community groups and various NRM organisations.



Strong leadership and community consultation helps mend the Goulburn Broken

Shepparton's John Dainton is a household name in the Victorian 'food bowl', Australia's premier irrigated farming region for fruit, vegetable and dairy products.

In corporate circles John was lauded for his business acumen during his years as a Director of Ibis Milk Products and later as Chairman of Bonlac Foods. He oversaw an increase in turnover of Bonlac Foods from \$300 million in 1986 to \$1.25 billion in 1999 and helped foster the company's international reputation for excellence.

John's no-nonsense, determined and self-effacing style of leadership has proved similarly effective when it comes to helping manage natural resources.

During his leadership of a succession of peak natural resource management organisations in the Goulburn Broken Catchment, the region established an enviable reputation for its approach to tackling environmental issues and forming partnerships with key industries. Initiatives included the development of salinity and weed management plans and developing and implementing regional catchment, water quality and native vegetation management strategies.

According to John, good leadership is as much about listening as talking.

"None of these major environmental changes that are needed for the future are straightforward but I think you can have success if there is proper consultation between the farmers, the wider community, the scientists and the bureaucrats," he said.

"Certainly, in our case, we had good land and water management plans, which were scientifically based but they were also overseen by the community. I could not tell you how many peer group meetings I went to during that period, explaining the problems and consulting with people as to how we were going to address them. When you get to the landholder level (which is the implementation level) it's understandable that they've got to be able to see some value in it for themselves."

John says that lobbying government decision-makers in an effort to attract sufficient funding for pilot projects was one of his most time-consuming, and often frustrating, tasks.

"One message I've really got for governments is that it takes resources to change farming practices. The science behind it all and the consultation has to be spot-on and skimming on these things will not get us the results that we need."

John Dainton's achievements stand as a testament to his highly effective style of leadership. Through the Community Fellowship scheme a grant was provided to assist author John Northage to write a book about John's life and work.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Visit: The Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority's web site www.gbcm.vic.gov.au

Michael's sense of place is home-grown

As a 10-year-old kid growing up on the bushy outskirts of Brisbane, Michael Petter set up his first environment protection group. This passion for nature travelled with him into adulthood and, combined with political activism, has remained the focus of his life ever since.

"I was always very enamoured with the idea of setting up people-powered organisations to manage the environment and move towards ecological sustainability," Michael said.

Unlike most States, Queensland has no statutory basis for catchment management, meaning communities have the power to establish their own novel structures to deal with local and regional issues.

For more than 20 years, mostly as a volunteer, Michael has helped pioneer community-initiated non-government catchment management groups, helping motivate local communities and "growing a sense of place".

"As a result of the studies I'd been doing I'd run into a concept called 'bio-regionalism', which is reorganising our political and social frameworks to align with natural boundaries," Michael said.

"My approach is to involve whole communities rather than specific sectors. It combines community development, economic development, social justice and environmental sustainability."

These days there is a well organised and active environment and natural resource management (NRM) movement in South-East Queensland.

"Many of our original aims from 1984 are reflected in the number of catchment, landcare and environment groups,

and in local and State Government plans," Michael said.

Despite a general improvement in the level of understanding and appreciation of the environment, Michael says his biggest challenge is still "the development at any cost mentality, which pays no more than lip service to the environment".

"We're still having to go to court to battle developers and having to lobby politicians to stop them back-flipping from promises they've made. Fundamentally they see bushland as a worthless commodity that can never economically match up to the benefits they see of housing developments, so every day in every way we're still up against the current economic and political system."

Working for little or no financial reward does not make for an easy life, but Michael says turning his back on the environment has never been an option for him.

"One fringe benefit I do get out of this job is that I can cycle around the city here and point to all the various bits of bushland we've helped save or creeks we've helped rehabilitate or artificial wetlands we've helped promote and see that we have been getting results."

With assistance under the Community Fellowship program, Michael has written a training manual for catchment organisers based on his own methods and experiences.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Read: *Growing Sense of Place - An Australian Catchment and Bioregional Organisers' Handbook*, by Michael Petter. The manual can be downloaded free of charge from Land & Water Australia's web site www.lwa.gov.au



John and Robyn Ive, Yass NSW.

Persistence and a cool hand heal salinity hotspot

John Ive is from the Yass Valley of NSW where with his wife Robyn and family he runs 'Talaheni', a 250-hectare farming operation which comprises ultra fine wool, Angus cattle and farm forestry. Since buying what was a very run-down property, severely affected by dryland salinity, in 1980, they have transformed it into a productive and environmentally healthy farm. It now attracts interest from people far and wide, who come to look and learn about John's methods of rejuvenating the landscape.

"I looked upon it as a challenge because I'd been brought up in the north east of Victoria where dryland salinity was an issue in the 1950s and I had a desire to put my general understanding and knowledge of these things into practice," John said. "We named the place 'Talaheni', which is Arabic for 'wait a while', in recognition of the fact it would take some time before the results of our efforts were seen.

"We used a range of techniques: first, we put in some graded contour banks to stop the water racing willy nilly across the landscape causing erosion; then we re-fenced the place in recognition of soil type and landscape characteristics; we managed high-recharge areas which were never going to be any good for pastures by re-establishing a good and vigorous tree cover; and we rectified the salinity problem and established healthier pastures by increasing the perennial pasture component. While we were doing all this we had in

place a substantial monitoring process so we could see the response to our actions."

The results speak for themselves. In 1980, about 26% of 'Talaheni' had obvious saline seeps over it. Now less than 2% of the property has saline seeps. Not only have the watertables dropped dramatically, but the salinity levels have dropped from something in the order of 3000 - 5000 EC (electrical conductivity) units to, in some cases, less than 60 EC units.

"And, importantly, we're producing more and better products even though we've taken over 25% of the property out of conventional production to establish trees and to ensure that the watertables are managed," John said. "People thought we were mad when we embarked upon this but in the past two years we've hosted something like 40 farm open days involving about 1200 people - the feedback would indicate a number of those people were more than impressed by what we've achieved."

John was awarded a Community Fellowship to assist with creating a web site to document the successful land and water management practices used at 'Talaheni'.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Visit: www.talaheni.com.au



John and Cicely Fenton with son David and granddaughters Georgia (left) and Harriet.



'Lanark' 1963. Photo: John Fenton.



'Lanark' 1992. Photo courtesy of Thompson Hay & Associates.

"I see farming that works within the conservation bounds as a recipe that must be grasped. The techniques to achieve a sensible balance are now known by leading researchers and land, water and ocean managers. Let's get on with it!" - John Fenton

Lanark's miracle

From God-forsaken to Garden of Eden

In 1956, at a time when many graziers in Victoria's Western District were clearing their properties of native trees and enthusiastically draining wetlands (encouraged and often obliged to do so by government policies of the day), John Fenton – a newcomer to the wool and prime lamb industry – began doing the exact opposite.

Dismayed by the dry, windswept barrenness of the 800-hectare property to which he had brought his young bride, Cicely, John embarked on a bold 100-year landscape plan to breathe new life into 'Lanark' and to ensure a sustainable farming future for their children and grandchildren.

Half a century on, the results of the Fentons' labours are nothing short of astounding, with the property having been transformed into a lush oasis of rich pastureland, shelterbelts, agroforestry plantations and indigenous habitats.

The road travelled has not been an easy one, driven by John's unshakeable faith in his vision splendid and his unwavering obsession with planting trees – hundreds of thousands of them! But these days, instead of being dismissed as a 'crackpot' he is saluted as a land manager who was decades ahead of his time.



John's grand plan also included water. By 1969 he had reinstated all of Lanark's original 63 hectares of wetlands. The largest of them, Lake Cicely, is a wildlife wonderland, home to 50 species of native water birds.

"My family and I regard the farm as part of a whole ecological and catchment system, which, for our future viability, needs to be maintained and enhanced," explains John.

"We categorise the soils and water bodies on any given piece of land so that:

- some areas are permanently retired from grazing and dedicated to wildlife corridors, wetlands, native remnant grasslands and major habitat blocks;
- other sections are partially grazed or cropped in combination with wetlands and trees, for example agroforestry and water meadows; and
- the environmentally safe areas are managed for continuous high production.

"All this is implemented with due regard for the landscape integrity of the farm and the region."

John's 100-year plan has now reached its half-way point; an appropriate time for him to have handed over ownership of the property to his son David and his family.

But the vision for 'Lanark' continues. Having achieved tree and shrub coverage of approximately 18 per cent, John believes that "a 30-35% tree and shrub cover, half devoted to wide-spaced agroforestry, would result in such soil and pasture conditions as would reduce the need for large and (long-term) damaging applications of artificial fertilisers, and contribute to a truly sustainable integrated agricultural system on the property".

In 2002, John was awarded a Community Fellowship to assist him in sharing the remarkable story of his on-the-ground experience at 'Lanark' with "as many people as possible and to play my part in linking farmers and other land managers with government decision-makers, students and the majority of Australians who live in urban centres".



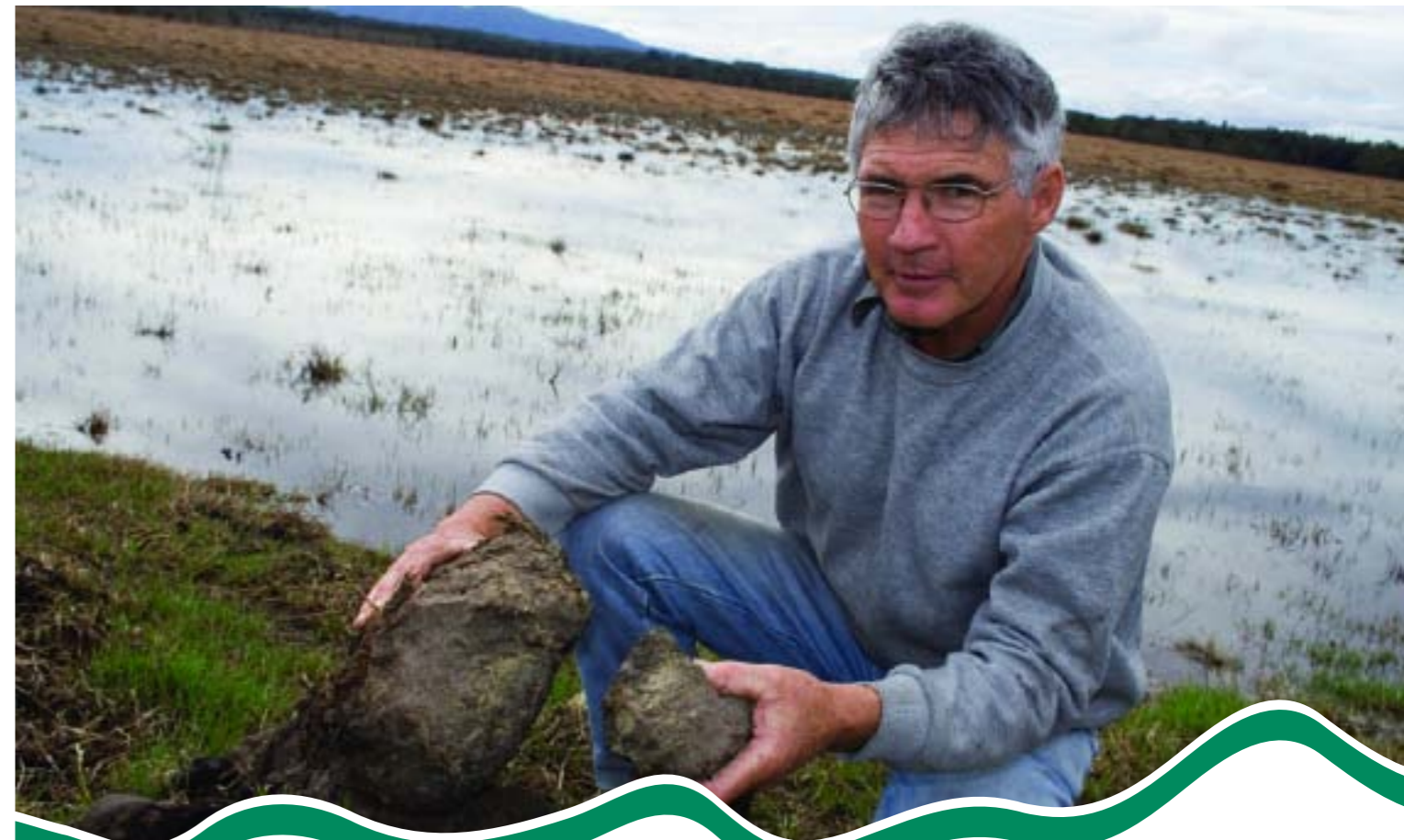
WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Read: *Renaissance on Lanark*, a 16-page full-colour booklet. (For a free copy ring CanPrint 1800 776 616, Product code PK991239)

Read: *Lanark: Farm Forestry*, a beautifully illustrated 218-page book by landscape architect Rochelle Rudduck. (First edition 1994. Second edition 1995. Published by Corporate Printers, South Melbourne. ISBN: 0 646 22625 8)



Russell Yerbury, Clybucca NSW.



Artificial ponding and wetland pastures have proved a productive solution to acid sulfate soils.

“From being one of the seven worst acid sulphate soil hotspot sites in NSW, the property is now producing again from the former scald, which is steadily shrinking. Level control structures in Seven Oaks Drain are working well, fences are being realigned to reduce grazing pressure on fragile soils, windbreaks are being planted, more water points for stock are available and biodiversity is on the mend.” - Russell Yerbury

Coastal grazier goes against the grain to heal acid sulfate scalding

Until they purchased their first rural property at Clybucca on the NSW north coast in 1992 Russell and Georgina Yerbury had no farming experience and they had certainly never heard of acid sulfate soils.

“We learned quickly, the hard way,” Russell said.

“Two thirds of our 356-hectare cattle grazing property is lowland back swamp country, dissected by a major flood mitigation drain which had been extended and deepened in the late 1970s to two metres below mid tide level.

“In 1993/94, through the combined effects of severe drought and deep drainage the water table was lowered

excessively. What we didn’t know at the time was that these soils are classified as actual acid sulfate soils (AASS) which release extreme acidity when exposed to oxygen.”

By 1994 approximately 120 hectares of the Yerburys’ farm and 80 hectares of adjoining property had become a major acid sulfate scald and dust erosion was stopping traffic on the Pacific Highway two kilometres away.

With advice from the NSW Department of Agriculture, Russell set up a small trial ponding project. This drew objections and criticism from almost everyone in the district, their fear being the presumed restriction of drainage.

“The initial trial showed promising results, but the Department of Agriculture employee who’d been assisting us resigned and no-one else appeared to be interested in our progress,” Russell said. “We therefore took it upon ourselves to expand the ponding program to the major acid scald area.”

“This entailed closing off all the inlets to the drain to maintain artificial ponding. Wetland pastures (water couch and soft rush) began to return to the former drained swamp area and with this new growth came a completely unexpected bonus. The water pH began to rise with the thickening of the ponded vegetation from readings of pH 2.5 to current readings of up to pH 7. This was due, we believe, to anaerobic bacterial activity in the root zone.”

Closing the drain inlets, although successful, was only a partial fix to the ground water table problem. Russell lobbied the local Seven Oaks Drainage Union, which controls the drain under State legislation, to construct a barrier to maintain a permanent high water table and therefore, restrict acid sulfate formation. His request was rejected.

“The battle continued from 1993 until 2000 when we decided to apply to Council for our own Development Approval. This was opposed by landholders, Drainage Union directors and Council staff. Finally, following an on-site inspection by councillors, approval was given. A low-level water table structure in the flood mitigation drain was finally built in 2001.”

While the project still has some opponents, Russell says attitudes are gradually changing.

“The Council now has an excellent acid sulfate officer and projects like ours are being promoted.”

The Yerburys’ use of passive acid scald management techniques on their property has resulted in:

- Dense coverage of native ponded pasture over a large area. (DPI agronomist trials at the property show water couch growth at 150 kg per Ha per day, equal to the growth and quality of irrigated lucerne.);
- runoff water at pH6+;
- frogs, fish and birds in water previously toxic; and
- Cattle grazing in excellent pasture that was previously a dust bowl.

Russell says it was a great honour to receive his Community Fellowship, recognising his environmental achievement.

“My fellowship certificate takes pride of place in our living room,” he said. “With the Fellowship funding we have had a DVD produced, showing the history of our project and made a PowerPoint presentation for use at wetland and acid sulfate conferences. A brochure, for distribution, is also being produced, to promote the management of ponded native pasture wetlands on a productive cattle breeding property.



'Lyndfield Park'.



John Weatherstone, Gunning NSW.

"Initially I was embarrassed because I thought here's me promoting conservative stocking rates and I'm now running more livestock per hectare than I was 20 years ago. But, in actual fact, it's exactly what I want to be saying: If you focus on the welfare of the land first, then in the long run you may actually be able to increase your stocking rates, whereas if you focus on the stocking rates ahead of the welfare of the land then in the long term you go backwards." - John Weatherstone

Drought forces the issue

Sowing seeds of perennial change at Lyndfield Park

John Weatherstone's family had been grazing and cropping 'Lyndfield Park', at Gunning NSW, for nearly 60 years when, suddenly, during the blistering summer of 1982/83 the property dried to a crisp and literally blew away. Threatened with financial ruin, John knew his only chance of survival was to start farming differently.

"It was the worst drought Eastern Australia had seen since European settlement," John recalls. "During that period millions of sheep were shot because people's reserves of fodder had been completely used up, as had ours, and it was almost impossible to buy in feed from other areas.

"On Christmas Eve, 1982, we had a howling north-westerly wind, the ground was absolutely bare and we had this huge dust storm. In the afternoon I went out to take some photos

because we'd never seen anything like it in our lifetime. I went over to the edge of the highway which runs along the side of our farm and I jumped over the fence to get a vantage point to take a photograph. I noticed that where grass hadn't been grazed, there between our fence and the side of the road, the dead grass had actually caught a lot of the organic matter blown by the wind off the surface of our paddock. In some places it was almost like a sponge of clover burr and other organic matter nearly knee-deep.

"I looked at that and looked at our paddocks on the other side of the fence which were absolutely bare and it gave me a real shock. As I stood there contemplating the significance of that, I made a solemn resolve to myself that if we survived that drought I was going to do something to try and see that

our farm never looked like that again."

Over the next two decades John completely transformed 'Lyndfield Park', adopting management practices which included:

- Establishing more than 100,000 trees and shrubs, mostly native, for livestock and soil protection, salinity and erosion control, seed and timber production and as a habitat for native wildlife.
- Changing from intensive cultivation to minimum-till and direct drilling of pastures.
- Adjusting stocking rates and grazing management to allow the build-up of higher organic matter levels in the soil.
- Progressively treating and stabilising all major erosion on the farm.
- Planting perennial pastures to stabilise the soil, improve productivity, maximise water utilisation and reduce soil acidification.
- Changing major income-earning activities, gradually over the years, from predominantly livestock and cropping to growing native seedlings and producing tree and shrub seed for farmers and other landcarers.

"We still run about 250 head of beef cattle," says John.

"In the 2002/2003 drought we didn't have to buy in any feed and in 2005 we brought in one just one truckload. In 1982/1983 our land was simply blowing away; at no stage during these recent droughts has our groundcover dropped to anything like that sort of level.

As a long-time advocate of conservative stocking rates, John says he made a surprising discovery when he dug out his farm records from 1982/1983 and compared them with his more recent records.

"I converted all the livestock carrying capacity to a dry-sheep equivalent so that we were comparing valid figures and when I put them side by side I was amazed to find we were carrying 50% more livestock in 2002/2003 than we had been in the 1982/1983 drought! I realised that we'd been able to do this successfully because we had more perennial pastures and because our stocking rates were secondary to the welfare of the land."

'Lyndfield Park' is widely regarded as a shining example of innovative and ecologically sustainable land use. In 2000 it was chosen as the venue by the National Farmers Federation and Australian Conservation Foundation for the joint launch of their campaign for major increases in government funding for natural resource management. Regular visitors to the property include landcare groups, schools, TAFE and university classes, overseas forestry groups, politicians and scientists.

John's Community Fellowship, awarded in 2001, enabled him to produce an illustrated booklet, which shares his farming experiences at 'Lyndfield Park'.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Read: John Weatherstone's booklet *Lyndfield Park: Looking Backward, Moving Forward*. (For a free copy ring CanPrint 1800 776 616, Product code PK030494)



Bill and Debbie Hill, Warrenbayne Vic.

"In the mid '80s I was sitting up on a rocky knoll on Broom Hills (one of our three properties) surveying the country, feeling really sad because the country just didn't look well. I thought, 'can't blame this on anyone else; it's the way it is because of how we've managed it, or not managed it. We've just got to change the way we do things'. And because I was philosophically predisposed to working in harmony with nature, I began asking people for advice and doing a few courses - Holistic Management and Grazing for Profit were the two major ones that really started to show me that there was another way." - Bill Hill

Soul-satisfying farming enriches land for future generations

Bill Hill is a farmer who wears his heart on his sleeve. His love for the land, and his spiritual connection to it, run deep.

He and his wife Debbie run a mixed grazing enterprise – angus cattle, fine merino sheep and prime lambs – in a pretty little valley at Warrenbayne, in NE Victoria.

Having farmed the same land since 1908, the Hill family has a generational commitment to working in harmony with nature. By combining alternative and traditional farming practices, they seek to manage an ecologically regenerative,

financially rewarding business whilst enjoying a happy, productive and soul-satisfying lifestyle.

"Over the past 20 years, we've fenced off degraded and vulnerable areas of our land and planted and direct seeded thousands of trees," says Bill. "This has created a beautiful and productive mosaic of grazing land interspersed with strategic plantings of shade and shelter trees and has also provided corridors for native flora and fauna.

"We accelerated the transformation of our landscape by

introducing a rotational grazing system, using solar power for electric fencing and for pumping stock water. We combined soil aeration techniques with a balanced fertilizer program to increase the biological activity of our soil and productivity of our pastures.

"We've also been involved in the Community Grasses program, studying native perennials. My favourite is microlena, which provides 20% protein and grows in battery acid – if you feed it with some fertiliser and provide rotational rest, it's the most magic grass. The native grasses are really proving valuable, particularly with our seasons becoming much less predictable. We need a management system that allows our pastures to utilise all the rainfall efficiently, where and when it falls."

Bill, who describes himself as "a grass farmer, a landscape architect, a philosopher, a futurist and a maven", is an eloquent and inspiring communicator who willingly shares his experience with others.

"We delivered a 'warts and all' paper at the Stipa Native Grasses conference at Dookie Agricultural College in 2001," he says. "It was well received and made us realise the importance of sharing our experiences."

The Community Fellowship enabled Bill and Debbie to develop a computer-generated presentation of the principles of their sustainable farming system, for a target audience of what Bill calls "fellow travellers" including farmers, landcarers and students.

"We were very grateful for the opportunity because over time we have accumulated a fair degree of knowledge and the PowerPoint presentation we were able to put together is something that I think resonates with a lot of people," says Bill. "They can see a real-life situation, showing before,

during and after pictures illustrating the problems we faced and the solutions, all of which reinforces that observing and working with nature is the greatest teacher.

"I've had the great good fortune to have some generous and committed mentors and I'm a firm believer that those who know the way should show the way.

"The environment we most need to change is the one between our ears. We can only develop new landscapes when we use new mindscapes, new ways of thinking, seeing and being."



WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Visit: www.billhill.com.au



Evelyn and Max Warren, Winnindoo, Vic.



"I see the only way the dairy industry can survive is with technology being used at its best. I believe the dairy industry here in Macalister Irrigation District is leading the way. Every year now Southern Rural Water brings out school groups to our Dairy Interpretive Centre and the main idea of that is for me to explain to them what we're doing with water and how we recycle the effluent. We have a big flood wash that we use at the dairy and everyone gets very excited when they understand that water is not wasted. It's used to irrigate the land." - Max Warren

Robotic dairy a world-leader in sustainable milk production

West Gippsland dairy farmers, Max and Evelyn Warren, didn't invent robotic milking. But in 2001 they did score a world-first with their concept of making their cows walk from the paddock to the shed, where they were milked, and back to the pasture, all without human intervention.

"Until they see it, no-one believes it," says Max. "But it's true that we don't even have to get out of bed to do the job. It's like a fairytale and the fairytale works."

Setting up the robotic dairy was an expensive business, costing \$1,000,000 to buy four machines.

"It was probably a pretty bold move to do it five years ago,

but I'd just suffered a heart attack at age 45 and we wanted to set up something so I could still continue on in the business. I believed that this was the way of the future and decided 'let's do it now before something else happens' and so I just jumped in."

Such was the interest in the new dairy that far from sitting back and putting their feet up, Max and Evelyn found themselves increasingly in the spotlight and playing host to a constant stream of curious visitors.

As a result, the Warrens' enterprise Tarawill Pastoral Co. rapidly became something of a showcase for the industry –

not solely because of their fully automated milking operation but because of their commitment to best practice throughout the farm, which included an enlightened approach to land and water management.

"What we've had to understand here is that we haven't got water laid on any more and we've had to adopt a different thinking, which is very hard when you come from an older generation, for whom there was always plenty of water," says Max. "No longer can we simply say 'we've got 120 hectares of land here – we will irrigate every bit of that land like we've always done'. We have to work out how much water will be available and change our farming practice to that. We have to recycle water and not waste any. It was nothing for us 10 or 20 years ago to let the water run down the drain – now no water goes down the drain."

So passionate are Max and Evelyn about promoting the dairy industry in Australia, especially to the younger generations, that they have established a Dairy Interpretive Centre on their property.



"We are constantly amazed at the interest shown by children and adults who have little exposure to agriculture in their daily lives," says Max. "Their thirst for knowledge about the dairy industry and particularly what we do to protect the environment through efficient use of land and water is an inspiration to us."

The Interpretive Centre has been the catalyst for the development of both online and printed educational material on a range of issues including: the history of the dairy industry; robotic milking of pasture-fed dairy herds; animal welfare; safe work practices; land and water use; effluent and nutrient control; and environmental impacts.

"The Community Fellowship helped us get our web site up and running and it also compensated us for some of the time that we spend getting the message across to people, which can be very time consuming," says Max.

"But I'm driven by the knowledge that the technology now available can enable dairy farmers to have an enjoyable and viable lifestyle, one that they can be very proud of. So if I get a busload of young people come through our dairy and I can inspire some of those kids to want to be a dairy farmer because it's exciting, then I think I've achieved something."

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Visit: www.roboticdairy.com



Hugo Spooner, Springsure QLD.



"There has been some ridicule over the years and my kids were teased at school because their father was a greenie but most of that came from people who don't really know what I do. They wrongly assumed that our Nature Refuge had been declared a National Park which they feared would be overrun with weeds and vermin, so we got a lot of criticism for that. In fact, we keep the area well maintained and continue to graze it for productivity." - Hugo Spooner

Turning green keeps Emerald grazier out of the red

In the traditional cattle country south of Emerald in Central Queensland, Hugo Spooner is something of an anachronism.

"My father raised cattle in Kenya prior to our emigrating here when I was six – it meant I grew up with a different perspective on the business," says Hugo, who for the past 20 years has strived to achieve a sustainable balance between productivity and caring for the environment on his 4500-hectare cattle breeding property, 'Avocet'.

"It's very fragile country where we are – shallow sandstone soil. In the 1982 drought we kept our cattle alive but only by further degrading the already degraded land. In the 1986 drought, had we done that again I would've ended up a basket case so I changed the philosophy. I reduced our herd

by one-third with the aim to bring it back up to the original number at the end of the drought. But when it finally rained I was surprised how quickly the country improved with the lower number of stock, so I decided never to increase the herd again.

"The controversial result of this was that because of the improved quality of our soil and pasture the fertility of our cows increased by about 15% and our productivity actually rose marginally with one-third less cattle on the site. I say 'controversial' because I live in an area where we were always told that it was impossible to be green and productive at the same time."

Hugo began focusing more and more on making environmental improvements and 10 years later, in 1996, he had a quarter of 'Avocet' declared a Nature Refuge under a voluntary conservation agreement with the Queensland Government.

"We still graze the Nature Refuge but we graze it conservatively and we abide by the contract and all its requirements," he explained. "Our main achievement with the refuge has been the introduction of a population of endangered flashjacks (bridled nailtail wallabies). This was the first introduction of its kind on to private land and was undertaken by the Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service because of our perceived responsible management of the refuge.

"We also started monitoring our pastures using an excellent management tool called Grasscheck, and also monitoring our water. We have a fairly major waterway running diagonally through our property, which is part of the Fitzroy River Catchment. In recent years we've fenced off the whole eight-kilometre length of creek on both sides. We never allow cattle into that corridor when there's water in the creek but we do graze it when the creek is dry and we've had an incredible improvement in the banks and the quality of the water."

Hugo says while some neighbouring pastoralists are gradually beginning to see the sense of the practices he has adopted at 'Avocet', there remains a fair degree of scepticism.

"There's been a slight rub-off; we have one neighbour who now has a voluntary conservation agreement on an area of his land that adjoins our Nature Refuge, but I think it's going to be a generational change. Cattle grazing methods are very traditional for most people of my age; I don't know anybody around me who does pasture monitoring or water

monitoring. But they don't completely dismiss it, they at least think about it."

Despite struggling in the grip of another prolonged drought, which began in 2003, Hugo is convinced his farming methods are sound.

"I've never doubted it and never will. One thing I have learned is that if you put enough effort into it and do your research and spend long enough at it you'll find the right solutions."

Hugo says being awarded a Community Fellowship gave an important boost to his morale.

"Being out in an area like this where other people aren't doing the same thing and often you get criticised, it's pleasing to get the sort of recognition that comes with something like the Fellowship," he said.

Hugo plans to produce a booklet about his farming experiences, which will include a substantial collection of photographs showing the positive changes in the landscape at 'Avocet' over many years.



Endangered 'flashjack' in Avocet's Nature Refuge.

Farmer as researcher

Forty years in the field

Lance Jones has fond memories of successfully milking his first cow when he was just five years old. Not surprising, when you consider that the Tasmanian farmer, now in his 80s, has always been ahead of his time and liked experimenting.

"In the early years, after I married Addie and we bought our own farm and dairy herd, we used a lot of artificial fertilisers. Sometimes we'd have two aeroplanes at once covering the whole 1000 acres and we noticed that after two or three days the animals all looked sick, their hair stood up on end and their ears drooped. We came to the conclusion that it was the raw superphosphate that they weren't able to dodge and this affected them for quite a few days until a rain came and washed some of the grasses and clovers clean of the dust.

"I had been following the advice of our Department of Agriculture for 'x' number of years but the animals simply weren't up to our expectations so I decided we should try something else.

"People thought I was mad when I decided to stop using superphosphate. I was the big laugh around the district, there's no doubt about that, but I couldn't blame people because they'd been trained the same as I had been."

Lance says he lost nothing by giving away the use of superphosphate.

"In fact," he says, "the production for the next five years was up on what we'd done in the five previous years of using fertilisers."

It was a turning point that set Lance on a 40-year path of trialling farming methods which were, in his view, "closer to what Mother Nature intended".

"Slowly I began to get interested in organics, and with the newly formed Organic Farming and Gardening Society in the 1970s I was able to talk with likeminded people," he said.

"Most of all, what we've gained over the years is knowledge of how to go about it and the [organic] system is, in my opinion, the greatest advancement in agriculture that I am aware of in my lifetime."

Lance says he was pleased to accept the Community Fellowship grant in order to produce a booklet about his move to organic farming, titled *Farmer as Researcher: Forty Years in the Field*.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Visit: www.lwa.gov.au/Practice/Community_Fellows/Lance_and_Addie_Jones/index.aspx

Better environment, better farm, better life

John Fyfe thanks his grandmother and an environmentally aware neighbour for setting him on the 'right path' when he and his brother left Melbourne to take up dairy farming on the Surry River near Portland in south western Victoria in 1960.

"My grandmother had a view that farmers were fairly destructive in the landscape and she asked me to read Rachel Carson's book, *The Silent Spring*. That book had a profound affect on me," John said. "Also, when we first moved to the property an elderly neighbour alerted us to the need to preserve the river. As well as a dairy farmer he was an orchardist and a beekeeper, and very environmentally alert. He had fenced his side of the river and gave us some second-hand material to fence our side and keep our stock out of the river."

John says that after a few years they started to see the benefits as the trees and bushes in the riparian zone flourished.

"You could go up the river as you were working during winter and find that it was warm. Once you started feeling warm and sheltered yourself then you knew you were getting it right," he said. "If there was a cold spell or a wind change coming you could put the cows into the sheltered paddocks, which minimised any loss in production.

"Over the years we built up 10 different smaller parcels of land and slowly increased our herd size to 400. We retained and developed the vegetation so that in the end it covered close to 15 per cent of the total 350-hectare area."

Together with other like-minded local landowners, the Fyfes took an active interest in the health of the entire Surry River system and its floodplain.

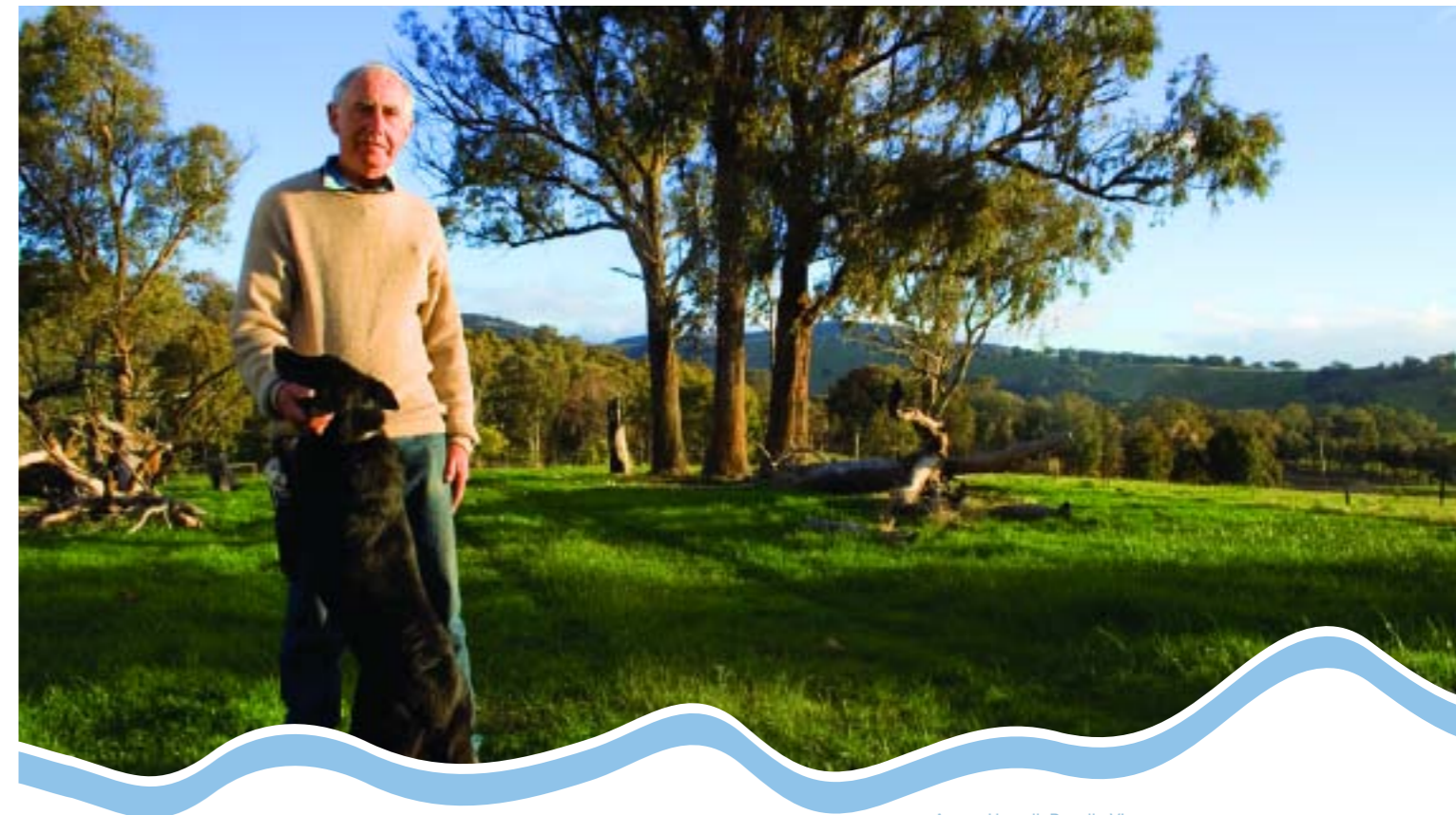
As a member of the Glenelg-Hopkins Catchment Management Authority, John was instrumental in developing the Surry River Management Plan.

"The Catchment Management Authority ran a project in conjunction with the local landholders to fence off the river estuary itself and I'm only too pleased to say that within about 18 months we were able to get over 90% of the estuary fenced," John said. "It was a measure of the community's knowledge of river protection and its willingness to be part of a whole-of-river project."

Now retired from the dairy industry (the brothers sold the farm with conservation covenants in place at "above the average price") John is still actively involved in catchment management and other environmental issues.

He was awarded a Community Fellowship to enable him to share his knowledge and 40 years' hands-on experience with a broad audience of farmers, landcare groups, and government and community organisations.

"I want to help people understand how they can achieve high production on farms as well as very good outcomes for the environment and for the community," John said.



Angus Howell, Benalla Vic.

Rotherlea a centre for on-farm education and research

When it comes to sustainable farming practices, veteran landcarer Angus Howell has always believed in leading by example.

For years he and his partner Diana Chomley have opened the gates of their 220-hectare cattle-rearing property 'Rotherlea', near Benalla in Victoria as a demonstration working farm, open-air classroom and a centre for scientific research.

'Rotherlea' showcases projects associated with salinity management, ground water movement, hardwood plantation design and growth, break-of-slope plantations and landscape management for biodiversity.

Since the late 1970s Angus has been a driving force behind the implementation of improved landcare practices in north east Victoria. For 12 of those years he was the full-time coordinator of the Warrenbayne and Boho Land Protection Group, formed by concerned local farmers and funded under the Australian Government's National Soil Conservation Program.

"One of the most interesting things during that period was seeing the change in attitudes to the way people managed their grazing regimes," Angus said. "I recall the time when farmers would graze their hills quite heavily and then the autumn rains would come and all the soil would wash off those hills and they'd be black. We don't ever see that now."

Angus believed it was important not only to tackle land management issues but to be 'seen to be doing the right thing' in order to gain support from governments and the broader community.

"We needed urban people to have some understanding that we didn't just have our hands up for assistance but that farmers were really preparing to have a go and were investing heavily in learning and changing their methodology," he said.

This became the impetus for a Rural Urban Link Program, which facilitated visits to the district by urban community groups, government agencies and students.

'Rotherlea' was often used as the venue for these visits and evolved over the years as a model farm and a centre for research.

More recently Angus and Diana have added farm-stay accommodation, an on-farm interpretative centre and converted a shearing shed into a classroom and meeting facility.

"The Community Fellowship has allowed us to devote time to exploring and developing relationships with a number of tertiary institutions, the Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority and the Heartlands Project, which has resulted in those bodies using 'Rotherlea' as part of their formal activities.

"I believe the most important thing I have gained from the Fellowship is the sense of self worth that comes from being recognised for having made, or being able to make, a contribution to the land and water management ethic. It has given me the resources and the confidence to do something which I may not otherwise have been able to attempt."

Dream of a team

Four land managers pool their experiences

Meet 'The Dream Team': Christine Jones, Darryl Cluff, Bruce Maynard and Colin Seis. These four individuals, all experienced farmers from NSW, are bound by a strong common desire – to help others look at the Australian agricultural landscape differently. And manage it differently.



The Dream Team (from left): Darryl Cluff, Colin Seis, Christine Jones and Bruce Maynard.

Christine is a grassland ecologist with a mixed farming background. Darryl owns and manages a mixed cropping, beef and prime lamb enterprise. Colin owns and manages a fine wool merino stud, kelpie working dog stud and mixed farming business. Bruce, now also in mixed farming, previously owned and managed a pig stud.

Assisted by a Community Fellowship grant, the Dream Team members documented their store of valuable knowledge about regenerative land management practices in a number of short publications and took part in seminars, field days and workshops throughout NSW, ACT, Victoria and South Australia in 2001.

They also played a key role in organising and presenting the Second National Native Grasses Conference held at Dookie Agricultural College in the same year.

Being able to speak from hands-on experience has given the Dream Team a lot of credibility with other farmers, receptive to hearing how they have managed to dramatically regenerate soils and combat problems such as dryland salinity, while at the same time increasing biodiversity, improving the quality of their lives and increasing their farms' profitability.

"We believe that the 'revolutionary' methods we have adopted define a point in Australia's history characterised by a fundamental change in attitude to the land," Christine said. "This new era will not be about planting things and hoping they grow; it will be about managing land in such a way as to create the right environment for a multitude of living things to thrive of their own accord."

The Dream Team's 'farming without farming' concept (Darryl has produced a book by that title) challenges farmers to question their traditional view of farming and to closely examine non-traditional methods aimed at achieving profitability within a holistic system of natural resource management – a well-trialled system designed to achieve long-term sustainability.



Christine addressing field-day audience at Armidale. Photos courtesy of the The Dream Team.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Read: *Farming Without Farming* by Darryl Cluff. (Available from STIPA Native Grasses Association Inc or The Book Connection, Dubbo NSW.)

Read: *Recognise, Relate, Innovate* by Christine Jones. (Can be downloaded free of charge through the 'Community Fellows' section of Land & Water Australia's web site.)

Read: *Regenerative land management: a whole of landscape approach to the restoration of water balance and water quality* by Christine Jones. (To obtain a copy of this paper email Christine: christinejones22@aol.com)

Visit: www.amazingcarbon.com is a web site set up by Christine Jones, which provides access to information on managing soil carbon to build better topsoil.



Andrea Van de Wouw, Timboon Vic.

Curdievale couple promotes high milk production, healthy environment

Andrea and Martin Van de Wouw have been dairy farming together in Western Victoria for the past 25 years. They share a strong commitment to promoting both the industry and the environment, on their own farm and beyond.

"We have been concerned about the sustainability of farming practices for a long time," Andrea said. "We believe in leading by example and by documenting the way we do things in order to promote the environmental and financial benefits of sustainable farming. We have produced information pages about our farm for many different groups including industry discussion groups, trainees and visitors from overseas."

Some of the changes at the Van de Wouw's property, which have resulted from their commitment to sustainability include: global positioning system (GPS) mapping of the farm; reduced use of detergents; extending tracks into wet paddocks to stop pugging in winter and to help prevent mastitis in the herd; spreading effluent pond sludge onto paddocks with low fertility and recycling wastewater for pasture irrigation; spreading straw from calf pens onto cultivated paddocks; and trialling alternatives to plastic silage cover.

"We really look at ways that are efficient and profitable for our business but also have minimal impact on the environment," Andrea said.

Andrea and Martin were founding members of two local landcare groups, Elingamite and Curdievale, and they are closely involved with a number of environmental and industry-based research projects. Andrea is also a board member of the Corangamite Catchment Management Authority.

"We are in a privileged position of having first-hand information about new research, catchment management and dairy industry projects, and I feel it is important that we share this information with other farmers," Andrea said.

"Our aim is to raise awareness of the negative impacts some farming practices have on the environment and promote better management across the broader farming community."

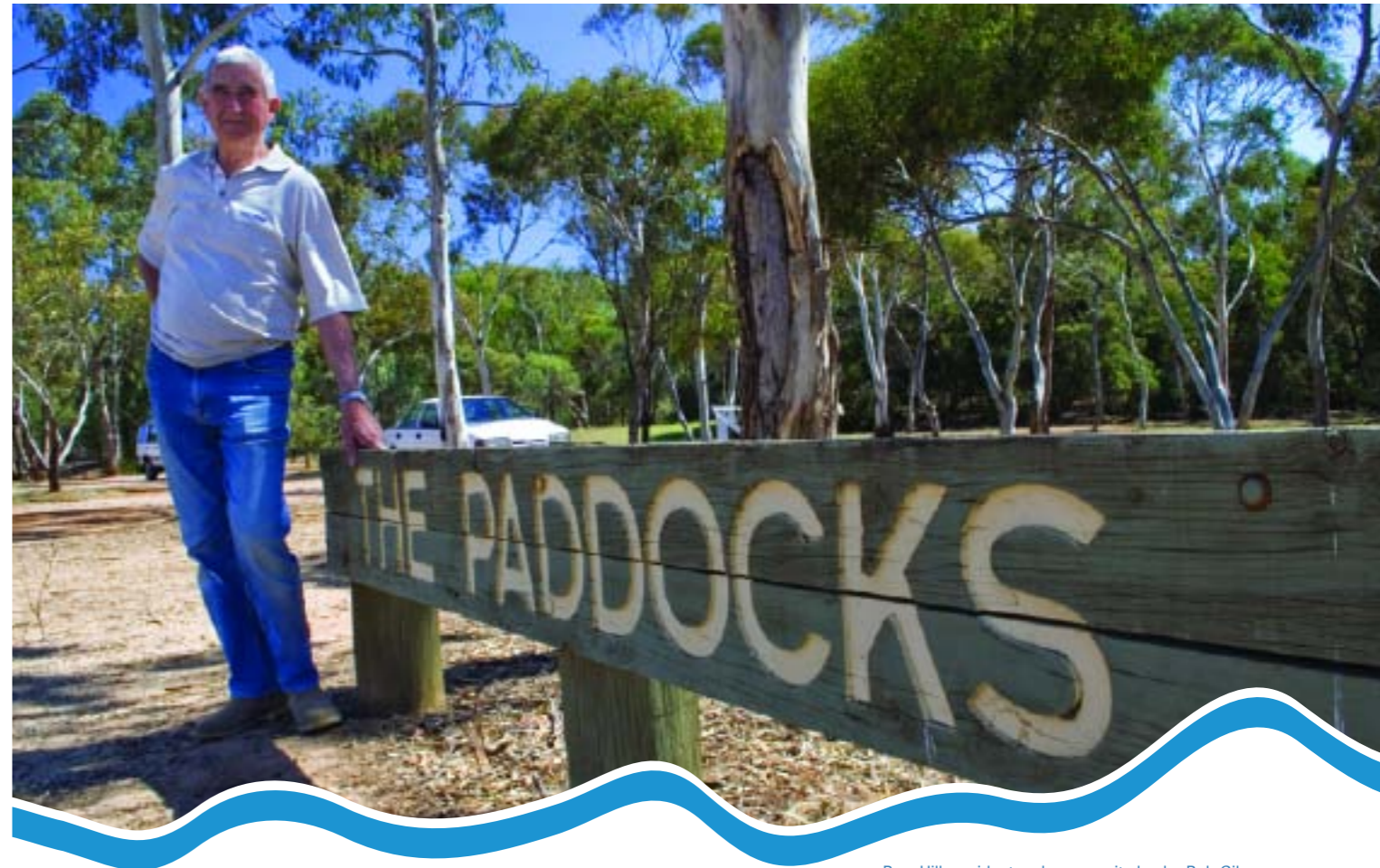
Andrea was awarded a Community Fellowship, to assist her in producing a bimonthly newsletter to be distributed to dairy farmers throughout the Western District.

"Being given the opportunity to share all this valuable information in a format farmers can relate to has been wonderful and the response has been excellent," Andrea said. "When I do an article about a particular program I try to include an interview with a farmer who has been involved. Farmers are very interested in knowing about other farmers' experiences; they really take their reassurance from that."





Para Paddocks wetlands.



Para Hills resident and community leader Bob Giles.

“Sir Mark Oliphant, who became South Australia’s Governor in 1971, stated: ‘Problems of the environment’s condition will not be resolved until the people assert ownership of them’. I believed he was inviting us to look around and if we didn’t like of what we saw, then we should correct it.” - Bob Giles

Para Paddocks

Saved by people power

The story of the Para Paddocks is about an Adelaide suburban community that, in 1972, persuaded the South Australian Housing Trust to revise its plans for a housing estate on flood prone land. It’s a story with far-reaching implications, about harmonising urban development with the natural environment and setting new benchmarks in stormwater management.

Central to the story is Para Hills resident Bob Giles: retired Union Secretary, plumber, community leader, ‘science and society’ architecture groupie and conservationist – sometimes referred to as ‘Adelaide’s Jack Mundy’.

Bob was nominated to be the community’s delegate when invited by the stakeholders (which included the Housing Trust, the State Government and the City of Salisbury) to a consultative planning process for the new development.

According to Bob, the plan initially favoured by the Housing Trust for the 172 hectares of derelict flat land located below the recently urbanised Para Hills escarpment, was unsuitable.

“Inappropriate engineering in the escarpment’s urban design, causing flooding in the lower hills above, and flat land below, suggested the likelihood of flooding should the same design standards be used on the flat lands”, Bob said. “We resolved in the community to prevent the effects of flooding for our future neighbours on the flat lands. We thought it would be wiser and more responsible to convert the problem into a resource, to use the water on site rather than pipe it, carrying its pollution with it, to the sea.

“So we told the Trust: ‘Okay, you want to house people, we’ll let you house people. You can even house them at

more than the conventional 12 persons per acre. You can go to 40 persons per acre, with a variety of social-mix house types, appropriately designed. But in the process we want a village green with decorative water features, bicycle and foot paths, passive recreation and sports fields that we’re short of, and reduced vehicular streetspace, compared to what we’ve got. The car won’t be king here’.”

As 1972 progressed the Para Hills community, united in purpose, flexed its political muscle.

“We got up a petition and within two months had collected nearly 5000 signatures,” Bob recalls. “It exemplified our community capacity to organise; footslogging around with clipboards, asking people to sign. We held street meetings with experts there to explain the objectives and answer questions. We were deluged with signatures, sending a message to the politicians, ‘Come the next election, you might have a problem if this issue is not resolved’.”

By purposefully advocating positive and innovative objectives, such as instating wetlands to restore water quality and storing it in an aquifer, Bob and his supporters eventually won their campaign.

“And being led by a Union Secretary with Green Bans form, and with Premier Don Dunstan looking on, I think all helped,” Bob admits.

As a result, the new plan for Para Paddocks achieved more – and more imaginatively designed – housing than was originally proposed, and incorporated creeks, mounds, grassed swales and floodways, ponds and wetlands.

“With inspired Council design, the now matured landscape of passive areas must closely resemble pre-European colonisation status,” says Bob.

Flood storage areas systematically retain stormwater, reduce silt loads, and extract pollutants so that only water free from contaminants makes it way into the aquifer 168 metres below.

Since completion of well-head works, pumps and control systems in 1996, Para Paddocks has been self sufficient in irrigation water requirements, saving the city in the order of \$50,000 per year in water costs.

“And the benefits weren’t confined to Para Hills,” Bob said. Salisbury City’s environment management policies were always healthy, but they reached a new level from the Paddocks experience.”

Salisbury drains into the Port River estuary. In the same year that the Para Hills community was demonstrating its solidarity, the estuary’s Barker Inlet was invested with Aquatic Reserve status, acknowledging its biologic integrity.

“That status is preserved by Salisbury’s fabric of 55 parks, on a wetlands theme, across its territory, enabling it to minimise the passage of pollution across the land / sea interface,” says Bob. “The wetlands theme derives from the Para Paddocks.”

Bob was awarded a Community Fellowship to assist him in writing a book about the Para Paddocks experience. It’s titled *Citizenship and Community Cohesion*.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Visit: <http://cweb.salisbury.sa.gov.au/manifest/servlet/page?pg=596&stypen=html>

Greenie Mula honoured for role in stopping radioactive waste dump

As a 21-year-old university student concerned with 'big picture' issues, Nina Brown was deeply affected by the story of the Kupa Piti Kungka Tjuta, a group of senior Aboriginal women from South Australia, who travelled to Melbourne to address an International Global Survival Conference in 1998.

The women spoke of their fears concerning a national radioactive waste dump that was proposed for their country near Coober Pedy.



Nina Brown and Eileen Kampakuta Brown being interviewed at Dusty FM in Coober Pedy.

"Their opposition and their drive to stop the waste dump was really informed by their being survivors of atomic testing in the 1950s and 1960s," Nina said. "I had previously been heavily involved in the Jabiluka campaign against a uranium mine up at Kakadu National Park, so the Kungkas' story was something that really resonated with me and once I'd heard it I couldn't turn my back on the issue."

Soon afterwards Nina moved to Coober Pedy and spent the next five years of her life helping to run the Irati Wanti (meaning 'the poison, leave it') campaign office and working, unpaid, in a support capacity to ensure that the Kungkas' message was communicated to the broad Australian community.

Working in difficult conditions with minimal resources across language and cultural barriers, Nina facilitated media opportunities, coordinated speaking tours, meetings and film screenings and documented the campaign. She was integral to the Kungka Tjuta being nominated for and winning the International Goldman Environmental Award in 2003.

During her time at Coober Pedy Nina earned the trust and respect of her Aboriginal hosts. She was taught about their culture, their languages and their inseparable link to their country. They also taught her about traditional bush tucker and medicines whilst on field trips in the desert.

In 2003, when the campaign was at its peak, Nina's tireless dedication was rewarded with the honorary title of 'Greenie Mula'.

"Translated literally it means 'true greenie', which is someone who cares about the Aboriginal people and who cares about the history of the country," Nina said. "I guess the Kungkas never really thought that I would stick around so long – they're used to white fellas always coming and going, as they tend to do in remote areas."

As a result of the Irati Wanti campaign, the radioactive waste dump proposal (at least for the South Australian site) was finally abandoned in 2004.

A year later, with Nina's assistance as co-editor, the Kungka Tjuta members launched a book, *Talking Straight Out*. Speaking at the launch, held to coincide with the anniversary of the first British atomic test detonated on Australian soil, Emily Munyungka Austin said: "We were fighting for a long time, but it's worth it to look after our beautiful desert. We made the book with all our words and all our pictures for everyone to learn how to fight for the country."

Nina was awarded a Community Fellowship to enable her to share her experiences at the Australian Women, Earth & Change conference held in Sydney in 2003. Her workshop presentations focused on the important lessons she had learnt about forming successful collaborative relationships between indigenous and non-indigenous female environmental activists.



Loretta Baker, Isobelle Coe and Nina at the 2003 Women, Earth & Change conference in Sydney. Photos courtesy of Nina Brown.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Visit: www.iratiwanti.org



ABOVE: Environmental consultant, John Craven.
BELOW: John addressing members of the Goonengerry Landcare Group, Byron Shire NSW.

Tibian Creek conflict results in successful community capacity building

Byron Shire, in Northern NSW, is renowned for its natural beauty and also for its residents' strongly held views on environmental issues. Therefore, in 1990, when despite community objections the Council approved a multiple-occupancy housing development at the headwaters of Tibian Creek, the local Goonengerry Landcare Group (GLG) swung into action.

The ensuing community campaign, assisted by environmental consultant John Craven, provided a powerful model of how to calmly and effectively manage and resolve potentially explosive disputes between community groups and developers.

"Topographically the development site was such that all of the land suitable for the building was also very close to creeks and gullies," John said. "It would have caused wastewater management problems and we believed the solutions that had been put forward by the developer were inadequate and environmentally unsound."

"After a long hard look at all the ramifications, we decided to take legal action. Because the DA (development application) had already been approved, the only way that we could challenge it was to take the Council and the developers to court."

GLG prepared a brief for a barrister (whose \$7000 fee was paid for by donations from GLG and the wider community) and this brief was strong enough to force the matter to Environment Court mediation.

"At this point, we engaged in dialogue with the proponents of the development and this was so successful that we ended up sitting on the same side of the table at the court mediation," John said. "This left Council defending its decision against the GLG and the proponents!"

A successful outcome ensued with all parties committed to healing the conflict.

"The process," says John, "involved many aspects of community development. The community learned about actions and techniques to resolve conflicts and the development of legal and mediation expertise was invaluable. Further, the water quality issues were resolved with the developers becoming strong advocates of wastewater management. The property has become a demonstration model available for inspection by the public and a venue for further education."

Assisted by a Community Fellowship grant, John produced a CD-ROM relating the story of the Goonengerry Landcare Group and Tibian Creek development and the lessons that were learned. The CD, which also includes blueprints for action as well as information on wastewater system design, has been distributed to landcare and other community groups and community legal services.



WANT TO KNOW MORE?

View: www.lwa.gov.au/Practice/Community_Fellows/John_Craven/index.aspx



Northey Street City Farm.



Giuliano Perez gives schoolchildren a guided tour.

“The history of the land is that it used to be all housing but in the 1974 flood the houses were washed away and Council turned the land into a park. Around 1992 there was a bunch of people gardening together in terrace backyards and they thought ‘why can’t we have a city farm in Brisbane’. So they started lobbying the Council and it allowed them to go ahead and start gardening there.” - Giuliano Perez

'Eat your park'

Learning to live sustainably in the city

Northey Street City Farm (NSCF), just seven minutes from Brisbane CBD, is a place where people from all walks of life come to get their hands dirty. In a peaceful, welcoming setting they learn how to successfully grow organic food and to live sustainably in an urban environment.

In the early '90s a group of ordinary residents transformed this flood-prone council-owned site from four hectares of mown-grass parkland into a productive community permaculture farm.

NSCF is a model of living sustainably in the city with its green waste recycling centre, edible plant nursery, compost toilets and native timber plantation. More than 1000 fruit trees and extensive vegetable gardens provide a rewarding lunch for whichever volunteers turn up to work on the day.

An Organic Food Market, held at the site each Saturday, attracts many hundreds of visitors.

Program co-ordinator and garden support worker, Giuliano Perez, came to the farm in 2003. Originally from Chile, Giuliano has a wealth of experience in cross-cultural community development programs.

“We have people here from diverse backgrounds so I came to the farm to co-ordinate a new project – the establishment of a multi-cultural garden,” Giuliano said. “We don’t offer payment so the level of people’s involvement depends on whatever time they have to give.

“The joy we all get out of it comes from getting in touch with the earth with a whole bunch of other people in an

urban environment. It creates a very strong sense of belonging for a lot of people.

“We have a very interesting structure where there has never been one person running the farm; it’s more of a collective which through the years has taken many shapes. The way it functions is strongly influenced by what grants are coming in and what sort of employment the farm can provide and so on.

“We sell things like seedlings and compost, but most of the fruit and vegetables are for the volunteers to eat – every day we cook up a big lunch from the garden. There is one area of the farm allocated to a small enterprise we’re developing – the produce grown there gets sold at one of the stalls at our Saturday markets.”

The farm has a strong focus on education and over the years it has become an important role model for other communities wishing to embark on similar projects. Giuliano says NSCF regularly receives requests for support and advice from all around Australia.

“The interest in developing community gardens in parklands, schools, community centres and church grounds has increased dramatically in recent years,” he said. “This is reflected by the fact that the Australian Community Gardens and City Farms network has contact with more than 180 community gardens from around Australia.”

With a view to sharing some of the knowledge acquired at NSCF, Giuliano and fellow farm-volunteer Natasha Moreton produced a half-hour video documentary titled Eat Your Park, assisted by a Community Fellowship grant.

“We were so pleased to be named as recipients of the Fellowship and very pleased to be able to tell the story of the farm,” Giuliano said. “It’s a very magical place.”



WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Visit: www.northeastcityfarm.org.au



Karyn Bradford, Milang SA.
Ibis in Milang Wetlands.

Image makeover

Smelly swamp to wonderful wetland

For many years the people of the small community of Milang, at the edge of Lake Alexandrina in South Australia, were embarrassed by a “smelly, mozzie infested swamp” right in the centre of the township.

Today, the eyesore has become an asset and a source of immense communal pride, largely due to a change of attitude brought about through education and understanding.

One of the driving forces behind the creation of the Milang Wetland and Snipe Sanctuary Project was local girl Karyn Bradford.

“Milang has always been close to my heart and I’ve always been involved in community projects and community groups,” Karyn said.

“When I first joined the Milang foreshore improvement group in 2000 we were looking towards tourism to help increase the economic development of the area and one of our ideas was to actually dredge out that area of swamp and perhaps create a little pond or a safe mooring area for boats. But as we proceeded with trying to get the necessary planning approval we began to find out more and more about wetlands and why they were important. We learned about migratory shorebirds, the snipe in particular, which comes to this area each year. As time went by we realised that our ‘swamp’ was in itself an asset to the community, but it had an image problem that we needed to change.

“So we set about turning a negative into a positive through community awareness raising and education and I put

together a draft plan for looking after the wetland habitat and wildlife.”

The group was successful in attracting funding and in-kind assistance from various bodies including the local council, the National Living Wetlands Fund and Conservation Volunteers Australia. Workshops were held so that interested members of the community could learn about wetlands monitoring, and the project area was fenced and signage erected explaining the importance of the wetlands and the various species of wildlife to be found there.

“The project has been an inspiration to our region and has brought incredible change to Milang,” Karyn said. “As part of the Coorong and Lower Lakes Ramsar site the sanctuary is now protected. Community capacity building has been heightened as has Milang’s sense of pride and community spirit and, in the long term, economic growth will result from eco-tourism activities.”

Karyn was awarded a Community Fellowship to share the Milang experience by speaking to other environmental groups in rural and regional communities and to produce a booklet of inspirational stories showing how local grassroots activities can have a big impact.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Visit: www.milang.org.au

Visit: www.wetlandcare.com.au

Pastoralists link with scientists and conservationists to preserve river's flow

As head of the Cooper’s Creek Protection Group, pastoralist Bob Morrish from Windorah in far South-West Queensland led a four-year campaign to convince the State Government to ban large scale irrigation from the region’s river system.

“The Cooper’s Creek along with all the other channel country rivers that flow into Lake Eyre are characterised by being in an exceptionally dry environment and one of the perpetual challenges we face in any grazing enterprise out here is drought,” Bob explained. “These rivers are the lifeblood of this region and they provide magnificent fattening pasture for cattle, so long as their periodic flooding is allowed to happen.”

In September 1995 a group of NSW cotton irrigators from the Macquarie Valley bought a property on the floodplain near Windorah, and applied to the Queensland Government for massive irrigation licences to take over 40,000 megalitres of water from Cooper’s Creek.

“That was perceived immediately by the whole community as a major threat to the future pastoral viability of the country because the extraction of water would result in the diminishing of flooding and normal flows, and of course it was also a threat to the whole ecological integrity of the system,” Bob said.

Bob and other members of the widely scattered community immediately formed the Cooper’s Creek Protection Group and began what turned out to be a long but ultimately successful fight to prevent the cotton enterprise from establishing in the region.

Bob attributes the group’s success to six factors: a strong and very vocal protest by a small but unified community; a strategic alliance developed with scientific and conservation organisations (with whom the graziers found they had a lot in common on this issue); use of the best available science to support the campaign; vigorous political engagement; widespread support from the general Australian public who wanted this iconic part of Australia’s landscape protected; and strong interest and coverage of the issues by the media.

In light of his experiences gained during the Cooper’s Creek campaign, Bob was awarded a Community Fellowship to conduct a speaking tour of communities in the Gulf region, to share his understanding of the Qld Government’s water resource planning process and encourage people to take an active interest in the future management of their river systems.



Reflections on a river

Bob McKenzie’s walk down the Hopkins

Two days after his 74th birthday, in the spring of 2000, Bob Mackenzie set out on an epic journey to walk the length of Victoria’s longest river, the Hopkins.

The trek was both a personal adventure and a community service, undertaken because to Bob’s knowledge no-one had ever done it before, at least not with a view to recording what they found along the way.

For five weeks Bob meandered with the river, from its source in the Skelton Hills near Ararat to where it spills into the sea 300 kilometres away at Warrnambool. His journey began in remnant native bushland and progressed through towns and farms, past billabongs, waterfalls, cliff-tops and thick scrub, to eroded banks, open pastures, and finally down to the estuary.

Supported by Gladys, his wife of 47 years, Bob camped comfortably each night and methodically recorded his experiences and his reflections. He took hundreds of photographs and kept notes of the people he met along the

way, the changing landscapes and the flora and fauna. He made daily recordings of the water quality in the river, which have provided a useful database for the Glenelg-Hopkins Catchment Management Authority. He also noted sites where the river’s banks had been degraded and eroded, as well as those that had been cordoned off and revegetated.

Bob’s walk captured the imagination of people far and wide, especially those from his own community of Mortlake, which he had served for many years as a member of Apex and Rotary. Inspired by the level of interest, he wrote a book about his experiences which immediately became a best seller and he was sought after as a speaker by environmental and community groups, service clubs and schools.

Bob who, sadly, passed away in late 2005 was awarded a Community Fellowship in 2001 in recognition of his achievement and to assist him in organising a series of talks across regional Victoria and beyond, based on the story of his book *Down the Hopkins*.

Ensouled Geography

Mapping Australia's sacred landscape

The Ensouled Geography project team has travelled more than 50,000 kilometres of Aboriginal 'song lines', mapping the ecological, cultural and spiritual understandings of these age-old travelling routes directly from their Aboriginal custodians.

An initiative of the Aboriginal Cultural Development Foundation (ACDF), Ensouled Geography aims "to recognise, rediscover, protect and manage the sacred visionary landscape of our ancestors, and to keep alive this tradition in today's society in both rural and urban contexts".

Three of the members of the Ensouled Geography project team are Senior Traditional Owners from the coastal regions of South Australia: Clem Lawrie (Mirning people of the West Coast); Karno Walker (Ramindjeri people of the Fleurieu Peninsula) and Brenton Richards (Barngala people of Eyre Peninsula).

The fourth, non-indigenous team member is Iain Greenwood, the Senior Project Officer of the ACDF.

Iain says that by cross-referencing traditional knowledge gathered from indigenous teachers – all tribal men and women of high degree – with 'white-world' environmental, geological and historical data, the project team has uncovered significant similarities.

"For instance, we found wherever we travelled that the important story (dreaming) sites were also places of considerable biodiversity," Iain said. "And we discovered that the routes followed the distributional limits of geological landform, soils, plants and animals."

"What we also found at particular story places along the song lines were 'gardens', as one of my teachers used to describe them. She would pull up along the side of the road and she'd say 'walk into there'. You couldn't see anything but dense bush but we'd walk in maybe a hundred yards then suddenly we'd come across an area of some acreage and it would be like an arboretum with a plethora of different species of use to man, both as food and medicinal. Our teacher would then show us the various uses of those plants."

Iain says in one of the 'gardens' they surveyed there were 26 species of human-use plants.

"Half of those were found only there and nowhere else in the surrounding 35,000 acres, so we wouldn't have known to look in this particular spot if it wasn't for that Aboriginal knowledge," he said.

The Ensouled Geography team was awarded a Community Fellowship to conduct educational workshops to demonstrate how traditional knowledge may be used to better understand "sacred places, water catchments, flora and fauna biodiversity, mineral resources, medicine bio-prospecting, traditional landscape modification techniques, song lines, tourism opportunities and land ownership".

"This knowledge is relevant to all Australians," Iain said, "and is particularly useful for those researching our land and its ecology, and other indigenous groups wishing to illustrate the value of their unique perspective."



Kevin and Kathy Collins, Mt Barker WA.

"You couldn't buy seeds for lots of species so we trekked all around Australia collecting seeds and getting permission to collect seeds. Ours became the world's first and only complete collection of banksias. This was verified by a banksia botanist from Perth who came and checked the identity to make sure that we weren't fibbing but, yes, we had every species growing here." - Kevin Collins

The Seekamp Collection

A 50-year record of floodplain salinity

More than half a century ago Jack Seekamp recognised the threat posed by salination to the Murray River floodplain in the fruit growing district of South Australia. Since then he has been in the frontline of community-led campaigns to raise public awareness and to redress the environmental damage caused by early irrigation and farm drainage practices.

Jack's knowledge of the Murray and the records he has accumulated over the past 50 years are considered a virtual goldmine for students and natural resource managers.

Having lived all his life at Renmark and having been a fruit grower there for 30 years, Jack has first-hand knowledge of the changes that have taken place over the years in drainage and irrigation methods.

"Early in the piece I recognised that what Renmark needed was not drainage so much as improved irrigation," Jack said. "Most growers didn't realise this – they wanted drains put in, come hell or high water, so the Irrigation Trust (the local irrigation system managing authority) gave them their drains at fairly enormous cost."

"The properties that were drained got enormous benefit in terms of increased production. But unfortunately the water that came out of the drains was pumped into 'evaporation basins' on the river flats close to the river and its tributary streams; these leaked and increased the inflow of very saline subsoil water into the river. So what was made better for Renmark fruit growers was made worse for those downstream."

"It was then that the Trust and the Government recognised

that what we needed was improved irrigation. I was the first grower in the district to put in a drip irrigation system and others followed. Since then there's been a dramatic changeover from 'flood furrow' irrigation to sprinklers and from overheads to low throws and to drip."

Concerned not just about the Renmark district but the whole Murray River floodplain, Jack embarked on an ambitious survey project during 1967-68. He documented his work on film. It was the first attempt, by anyone, to conduct a methodical salinity survey of the river from the mountains to the sea, and was well in advance of the first 'official' report commissioned by the Murray-Darling Basin Commission in 1970.

'The Seekamp Collection' as it is known, includes historical notes, hundreds of still photographs and Jack's Super-8 movies from the 1960s. In recent years Jack has been working to archive and preserve these priceless records in digital formats.

With assistance through the Community Fellowship scheme, his film *Salt in the Murray* was professionally edited and is now available on both CD and video and more than 50 of his 'picturebooks', each containing images and notes on a particular topic, have been scanned and converted to PDF format.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

View: www.lwa.gov.au/Practice/Community_Fellows/Jack_Seekamp/index.aspx

Banksia Farm a botanical treasure chest

Banksias had always been a favourite of Kevin and Kathy Collins so when, in 1983, they uprooted from suburban Perth and moved to a small rural property at Mount Barker in south Western Australia, they set about planting a few of the pretty flowering natives.

"What we'd bought was a denuded paddock, which we set about building a house on," says Kevin. "It had a beautiful view but the site itself was windswept and empty – so we looked at ways of revegetating it."

"We had a whole range of soil types – deep acid sand, peaty swamp, ironstone rock, gravelly loam and sandy gravel – and this actually enabled us to grow all different kinds of banksias."

Growing everything from seed and with no 'how to' manual to guide them, there was a lot of trial and error involved.

"We got a little bit of information from banksia study group members across Australia and a bit from the Department of Agriculture," says Kevin. "But essentially we were going where no man had ever trodden in trying to grow, say, Queensland banksias from humid, high rainfall areas in Mount Barker, which has a cool temperate climate."

What really sets 'Banksia Farm' apart as something unique and precious is that Kevin and Kathy have managed to grow every known banksia – 76 species and 20 subspecies – making it the world's first and only complete collection.

"We often say it's a hobby gone mad," confesses Kevin. "But our objective was to revegetate and to encourage the wildlife to come. We've created a really thriving ecosystem with little pigmy and honey possums, bandicoots, a myriad of birds and bird nesting sites and lots of frogs. We're looking at all aspects of our ecosystem – you know, once we didn't use to see fungi or those types of things but we do now – and it's really exciting."

The farm has become one of the district's major attractions, welcoming large numbers of visitors who come to acquire seeds or simply to marvel at the living collection. People accustomed to thinking of banksias as shrubs are amazed to walk under 30-metre trees, so voluptuous they can't put their arms around the trunks.

As recipients of a Community Fellowship, Kevin and Kathy are producing a booklet to document their achievements and to pass on the knowledge they've acquired to other enthusiasts.

"We see it as a great opportunity to show people what they can do with a small piece of land by specialising in a particular group of plants or specialising in some other manner," says Kevin.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Visit: www.banksiafarm.com.au



Grant Hobson. Photo courtesy of Dave Kirner.



Grant's poignant photo of a sea lion with her pup at Sceale Bay.

"The Chain of Bays area, on the far west coast of South Australia's Eyre Peninsula, was off the main track for a very long period of time and was managed sufficiently well by its isolation. Only recently have we become aware that unless certain mechanisms are put in place the area's high natural heritage values – its spectacular coastal and marine wildlife – might not necessarily be around for the future." - Grant Hobson

Media spotlight key to protecting remote coastal ecosystem

Pictures speak louder than words when it comes to conveying the vulnerable beauty of a coastal area so remote that it's off the visiting list for most politicians, bureaucrats and media.

As national convener of a South Australian community group called The Friends of Sceale Bay, commercial photographer Grant Hobson has put his artistry to good use in an ongoing campaign to conserve a pristine coastal marine environment, which captured his heart on his first visit there more than 20 years ago.

"I went to that part of the world in about 1984 as a young student to visit my sister who had married and moved there," Grant said. "I continued to visit over the next 10 years and eventually bought a very small shack in the coastal community of Sceale Bay."

In 1998, Grant says a proposal for a 40-hectare kingfish farm in the bay, virtually next door to a sea lion breeding colony, set alarm bells ringing.

"Fish farms and pinnipeds do not co-exist favourably in close quarters," Grant said. "These intelligent mammals will try anything to attack fish stocks, and the result is that sea lions end up being habituated to these locations. In Tasmania there is a strong industry push for the right to kill seals that visit fish farms."

"One of the local residents, Bob 'Spike' Minnican, alerted us to the fact that unless the development was opposed by approaching the Development Assessment Commission and being very specific about our community's concerns, it was likely the aquaculture development would proceed," he said.

"At that time the Primary Industry Department of South Australia was strongly advocating in favour of this particular development and also aquaculture in general. We had to challenge the prevailing wisdom that there was no threat to the environment or any other animals by locating these types of developments anywhere along the coastline.

"We had to literally invent ourselves as a very small but very committed community group. We gave ourselves a name: The Friends of Sceale Bay. We got on computers and started writing letters but most importantly we produced communication materials for the mainstream media that showed the wider community that there were pernicious aspects to these types of developments, particularly in relation to marine mammals. We directed our campaigning to specific people within Government and were able to communicate with the media clearly through press releases and through high quality imagery.

"Through photographs and video footage we made people sit up and look at the Australian sea lions, the whales, the ospreys, the sea eagles and all the other iconic species that people feel quite passionately about. We enabled them to see that it would be tragic to lose what we had here."

After nearly three years of intense lobbying, the Friends of Sceale Bay were ultimately successful in their bid to overturn approval of the kingfish farm and have the sea lion breeding colony declared the State's newest conservation park with prohibited area status.

"Our success with the media and lobbying for appropriate ongoing management of the Bays (Sceale, Bairds, Searcy and Corvisart) can be gauged by the fact that we have been able to forge bonds with the scientific community and Government. There is now an agenda to consider the area's unique natural assets where in the past there was little, if any, motivation to do so."

Being awarded a Community Fellowship has enabled Grant to produce a book, which through his stunning photography chronicles the Bays' unique landscape and its inhabitants from the mid 1980s to the present day.



WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Visit: www.granthobson.com

Visit: The Australian Marine Conservation Society's web site. www.amcs.org.au

Heartfelt songs from the Mallee

Jeanette Wormald, a former journalist and now a broadacre farmer, singer and songwriter, is passionate about changing attitudes towards the oft maligned Mallee country of South Australia.

Together with her husband Dean she is convinced that the introduction of sustainable farming techniques is the key to the region's achieving economic prosperity and sloughing off its ill-deserved reputation as 'the devil's creation'.

"With my background in journalism I was often targeted by the media when there were issues confronting the Mallee and because Dean and I were taking up more sustainable farming methods through our membership of the Mallee Sustainable Farming Project I was seen as the 'local voice'.

Her outspokenness, she says, was not always appreciated by some other Mallee locals who resisted the call to change their traditional methods of farming.

"Over time I realised that music is actually a far more powerful tool and also more gentle in that it gets in underneath and changes people's perception without being as confronting as speaking at them."

Jeanette's Community Fellowship was used to develop and tour her *Horizons and Heartlands - Songs and Images*

from the Mallee concert. The unique multi-media presentation featured Jeanette performing her original songs against a backdrop of powerful images celebrating the Mallee environment, sustainable agriculture and the region's rural heritage.



Jeanette Wormald, Loxton SA.
Photo courtesy of Lindene Music.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Visit: www.jeanettewormald.com

Landscape seen through artists' eyes

Mandy Martin is a professional artist who uses her talents to raise awareness of environmental issues and to encourage people to better appreciate the spiritual, cultural and aesthetic values of landscapes instead of regarding them solely as natural resources with a dollar sign attached to them.

Mandy and her husband, Guy Fitzhardinge (an environmental consultant), operate a pastoral enterprise at Mandurama in the NSW Central Tablelands, next door to the largest gold mine in Australia.

"There was an assumption among many of our community leaders that gold mining was of benefit to a district like this – it was their job to create progress and they really didn't care about the impact it would have on the actual landscape, taking a huge chunk of it away forever," Mandy said.

In 2002 Mandy mounted an exhibition titled *Land\$cape: Gold & Water*, featuring works on an environmental theme by 21 artists with a connection to the region.

She says the exhibition was designed as a gentle way in which to influence people's perceptions and to contribute to the debate about the short-term benefits of mining compared with the long-term environmental and social costs.

"We had a lot of people come to see it," Mandy said. "Even

the mine personnel were quite supportive; they came along and were really curious and interested in what we were doing."

Land\$cape: Gold & Water was displayed over several months during 2003 at Cowra Regional Gallery, Orange Regional Gallery and at the Australian National University in Canberra.

Mandy was awarded a Community Fellowship to enable her and her project team to produce a 56-page catalogue to complement the exhibition. The publication (which was also made available online) featured the work of the artists and included essays by notable environmental scientists and researchers.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

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"The people whose stories emerge so vibrantly from these pages have already changed their worlds. They have created lasting legacies in their communities and their landscapes. They have worked over many years – decades in some cases – to fix up environmental problems or to develop new and better ways of living with the land. Some have worked alone, many have led their communities, all have inspired others."



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