

Case study

Merimborough and Yarrie Lake Landcare Groups

Common ground

The Merimborough and Yarrie Lake Landcare Groups share a geographical boundary and have found benefits in sharing much more.

Both groups were formed in the late 1990s. Merimborough Landcare represents about 20 members, while the Yarrie Landcare Group has upwards of 40 members. The two groups cover an area of approximately 500,000ha from the Pilliga to the Namoi River, bounded by the Newell Highway.

The area is largely relatively flat floodplain with some mountainous to undulating country to the east.

The Landcare groups realised the benefits of working together close to 10 years ago and entered a Joint Venture Agreement.

More recently, discussion between members led to a proposal to seek joint funding for a program of events to fulfill a number of aims: to increase knowledge and awareness to adapt to climate variability and build resilience on farms; to adopt beneficial technology; to improve land management; and to improve productivity and economic sustainability.

This project is delivered by North West Local Land Services through funding made available

from the Australian Government's National Landcare Program.



Figure 1. Yarrie Lake Landcare's Rob Duncan and Merimborough Landcare's Mark Shearin on the banks of Yarrie Lake.

Learning on the land

The Merimborough and Yarrie Lake Landcare Groups' Project has included 20 capacity building activities over a four-year period, to be followed by a new strategic plan.

As the project nears an end, Merimborough Landcare's Mark Shearin says it has delivered benefits each of the groups would not have been able to access alone.

“Even though we cover a lot of country, we don’t necessarily cover a lot of people,” Mark says. “It can be difficult to get the numbers and it has been better that we work together. We have a lot of synergies.”

Yarrie Lake Landcare’s Rob Duncan adds there have been “trials and tribulations” along the way, but the project has been a resounding success.

Rob says members have been given access to the latest technology and knowledge and it has made a significant practical difference to their farming methods.

A session with an expert on improving wheat yields on sodic soils has brought change on Rob’s own property.

“We used that knowledge and changed our wheat variety from Elmore to Sunblade,” Rob says. “We have seen a 6.5% yield increase.”



Figure 2. A meeting of Yarrie Lake Landcare.

Mark adds the same workshop helped farmers understand the benefit of end-point royalty payments for wheat.

Similarly, Rob says a session about saltbush evaluation in Narromine saved their members years of heartache when they learnt there was little point planting saltbush in areas with a clay band within 1m of the surface.

The workshops have included sessions on telemetry, composting, carbon farming, soil structure, stock handling and much more.

A workshop on dung beetles drew strong interest from children, involving the youngest generation in the Landcare project.

The joint activities also proved valuable during the prolonged drought of recent years, providing social opportunities in addition to learning.

“In the middle of the drought, we all needed time away,” Rob says. “There was a bit of larrikinism on the bus trips and it helped bring a sense of community.”

Where to from here?

Both groups agree the project has met the objectives of increasing practical knowledge and awareness of innovative practices in farming and grazing.

But as the project finishes, they agree it is time to “reset and restart”, to use the knowledge they have gained, and to regroup to look at their priorities for the future.

In the middle of the drought, we all needed time away... it helped bring a sense of community.

– Rob Duncan, Yarrie Lake Landcare

Mark says both groups’ membership remain strong, and they continue to benefit from joint sub-groups where members have specific interests. A review of members’ issues will inform their joint future projects.

For more information

Contact your nearest Local Land Services office on 1300 795 299 or visit our website www.lls.nsw.gov.au



Figure 3. Landcare members discussing topics at a field day.