

Catchment Management Authority and Landcare – a partnership that accelerates implementation of landcare priorities.

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Regional partnerships between Catchment Management Authorities and landcare have the potential to accelerate the quantity and quality of work undertaken in a landscape. However this potential can only be reached if there is a genuine and enduring partnership built and maintain over time. The elements of a successful partnership need to be nurtured and have a local context that needs to be respected. Regional structures should enable the local context of the partnership to be dealt with by people who have more empathy with the local situation and can respond more rapidly and sympathetically.

The Woody Yaloak Catchment Project

The 120,000 ha Woody Yaloak catchment south west of Ballarat commenced in 1993, through an initiative of the Victorian Farmers Federation, Greening Australia and Alcoa. When the project started less than 1 per cent of the private land had tree cover, there were more than 450 areas of gully or rill erosion, 850 ha of land salting and the catchment was dominated by annual pastures which left soils exposed to wind erosion over summer. Rabbits and gorse problems were extensive. More than 240 tonnes of salt a day was leaving the catchment, flowing either to the Barwon River (by diversion) or accumulating in the wetlands of Lake Corangamite, a lake of international importance.

During the past 13 years work has commenced on these issues and while progress is being made there is still a long way to go because of the scale of the task. For example tree cover on private land has reached three per cent of the catchment, nearly half of the landscape has been sown to perennial pasture and about 60 gullies have been treated. We also have a very good understanding of the salinity process and are commencing major work that will show a measurable decline in salinity within 5 to 10 years.

Most of the land in the Woody Yaloak catchment is privately owned. To achieve the desired improvements in the catchment requires these private land managers to voluntarily agree to undertake works on their land. In the Woody Yaloak Catchment Project it also requires each individual to make a cash and in kind contribution. Therefore encouraging and maintaining participation is fundamental to our project achieving natural resource management outcomes with a multiplier effect.

Understanding the role of participation in achieving landscape change

A simple equation highlights the influence an individual can have on shaping landscape outcomes.

$$\boxed{\text{Total amount of work completed}} = \boxed{\text{Quantity of work each individual undertakes}} \times \boxed{\text{Number of individuals participating}}$$

This leads to increased work per farm using improved management practices with the result being larger and more rapid total catchment outcomes. Influencing either the quantity of work or the number of individuals participating will alter the total amount of work achieved. However if we get twice as many people to do twice as much work, there is a four-fold increase in the amount of work completed. An examination of the history of the Woody Yaloak project illustrates the power of this effect.

Four individual landcare groups were operating in the Woody Yaloak area before the catchment project formed. During this period participation in landcare was around 20 per cent. The formation of the Woody Yaloak Catchment Group (WYCG), the inclusion of farm productivity under the landcare banner and the provision of technical support to individuals saw participation rise to two thirds of the catchment. This has been maintained and gradually increased during the past decade. However the executive committee of the Woody Yaloak Catchment Project recognised that to accelerate landscape change further would require each individual to do more projects and on a larger scale.

In 1999 the Woody Yaloak Catchment Project formed neighbourhood groups, a process where neighbouring farms collectively discuss a range of landcare issues and plan for works that link individual property activities (Clarke, 2006). At the same time the WYCG formed a partnership arrangement with the Corangamite Catchment Management authority (CCMA) to provide funding for a range of issues and with some degree on continuity. The result has been that in 2005 more than \$1.01 million of landcare works were undertaken by 170 land managers, a four fold increase on 1999 (Figure 1). Two thirds of this investment comes from the landholders involved.

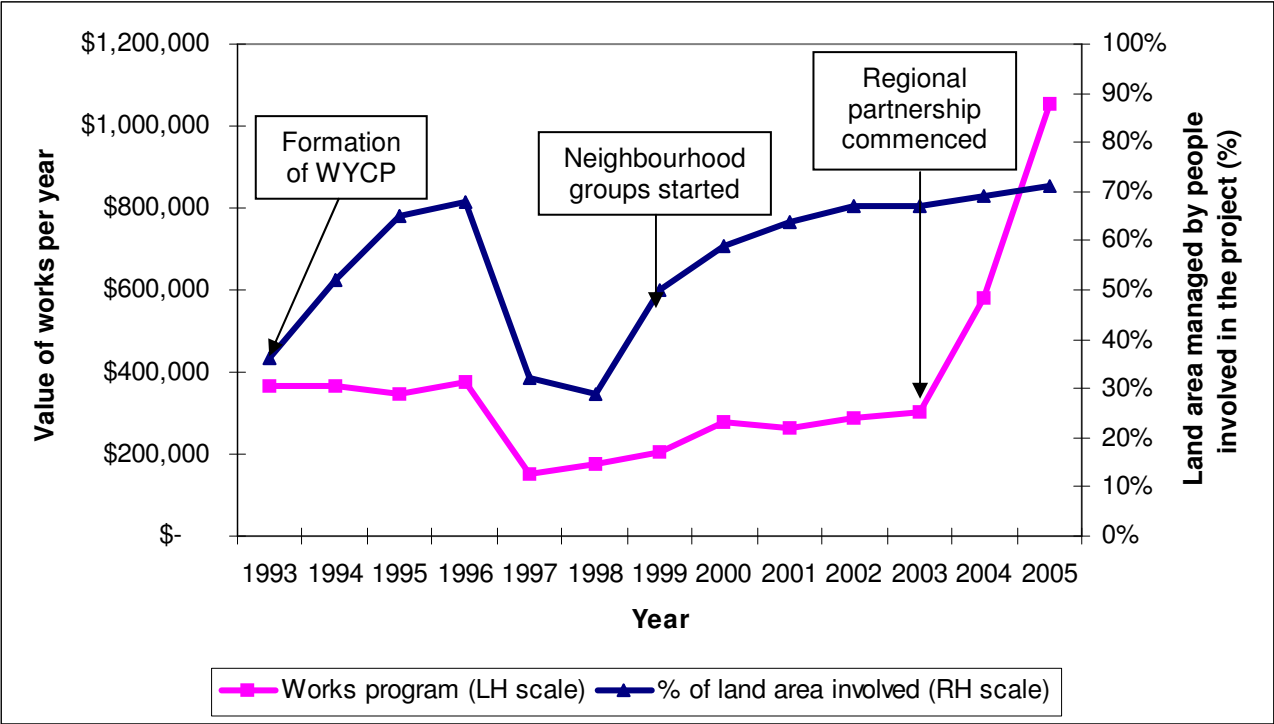


Figure 1: Annual value of on ground works and landholder participation

Elements to sustain participation

Volunteers have a choice of whether to participate or not. Apart from some obligations through laws such as pest plant and animal control and native vegetation clearance, the majority of work that the Woody Yaloak Catchment Group and the CCMA are encouraging is currently done by choice. This includes activities like erosion control, salinity management, protection of waterways and native vegetation enhancement. The outcomes of this work almost always has public benefits, such as improvements in water quality and biodiversity. Therefore a reduction in participation has a direct link to total project outcomes, especially if those withdrawing their support have these degrading processes occurring on their property.

Sustaining participation can be a challenge. After 13 years of experience, the WYCG believe the key is simply to make it easy to be involved. The more difficult a task becomes for a volunteer, the less likely they are going to want to be involved.

Unfortunately making it easy to be involved is difficult. Some of the things that make the task more difficult include:

- Delays and uncertainty in resourcing, which means project can take months or even years to achieve.
- Increasing rules and restrictions on the eligibility of projects.
- Targeting of projects to specific locations in the landscape, that excludes neighbours and destroys community cohesion and negates peer group pressure.
- Excessive paperwork and reporting.

Much of the work of the WYCG committee and the staff is working behind the scenes to ensure the offers being made to landholder simple, quick and enjoyable to complete. Individual landholders are largely shielded from the difficulties by the hard work of the project management team.

The same can be said for the CCMA, who has tried to address some of these difficulties before engaging with the WYCG.

The impact of regional partnership in influencing participation

Regional partnerships provide greater opportunity to address regional difficulties than State or Federally administered programs. This is simply because the variation in circumstances encountered at the local level are better responded to by people that have some empathy for the landscape, the people and their circumstances. It also allows local issues to be raised, although they may not necessarily be included in the regional priorities.

The success of regional partnerships is relatively straightforward where both groups want to achieve the same outcome. In the Woody Yaloak catchment, an issue such as salinity management fit these criteria and the regional negotiations allows the full opportunities to be exploited.

But how does the regional process cope when landholder and CCMA priorities don't align? Regional engagement should allow these issues to be expressed and theoretically solved at the local level.

Unfortunately empathy and engagement does not solve all problems. The CCMA is a statutory organisation and is required to adopt certain approaches and work within

the boundaries of what appears to be increasingly narrow eligibility criteria provided by the State and Commonwealth. Directives like the asset-based approach to prioritisation, which increasingly defines where in the landscape action will be funded will by default, exclude people who were previously involved. This approach makes sense from an economic rationalist, who wants money invested into the highest priority, but comes at a cost in terms of community cohesion and in the long run sustained participation. Destroying the good will of individual landholders by reducing possible participation in projects creates less investment by landholders for the same initial government funding and in turn slows the rate of change of the landscape. Excessive reporting requirements and the growing list of minimum standards such as the vegetation guidelines that specify the types and configuration of species to be planted, reduces individual choice and makes it harder for individuals to be involved. As a result they will chose not to participate and activity will decline.

Conclusion

The regional approach to program implementation can achieve greater catchment outcomes than State and Federally administered programs. But it relies on the creation of genuine partnerships, where the priorities of both parties are respected. It also needs the regional authority charged with administering the programs to have the capacity and flexibility to alter investment criteria to suit local needs. After all, it is improved management of the natural resources of the total catchment that is the aim of the CCMA and the WYCG.

References:

Clarke 2006.

Neighbourhood Groups – connecting farmers to each other and their landscape. International Landcare Conference Proceedings. Department of Sustainability and Environment. Victoria.