

## Landcare – Linking Science to paddocks

### Session 6 – Corangamite Regional Case Study The Woody Yaloak Catchment Project

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#### Background

The Woody Yaloak Catchment Group formed in 1993, the joining of four existing landcare groups. The headwaters of the 120,000 ha catchment is on the outskirts of Ballarat and flows about 70 km south to the RAMSAR registered Lake Corangamite. The Corangamite basin is land locked, with an artificial drain diverting water to the Barwon River.

Since inception the Woody Yaloak Catchment Group has achieved a high level of participation (average 65% per year). Projects have exceeded \$5.3M with more than half this money coming from landholders. Details of the project can be found at [www.woodyyaloak.com.au](http://www.woodyyaloak.com.au)

We have been reasonably successful at bringing science to the paddock but also bringing private enterprise and Govt priorities together to achieve a wider community outcome.

In its simplest form, the Woody Yaloak Catchment Group acts as a broker. We create and deliver programs at the catchment level to achieve desired outcomes for government *and* landholders. To do this we use a huge range of government, industry and private opportunities. Our 'hook' is *Productive Catchment Management*. That is undertaking production and conservation activities in parallel. The Alcoa sponsorship in the early 90's gave us the ability to go it alone when combining conservation and production was not an accepted approach.

Performing the brokering role is not that hard if you follow a few simple extension rules:

- Nobody likes having things done to them without their consent (private individuals, business or Government)
- Ask don't assume. Never try and guess a response or reaction – make the effort to find out
- If you show an interest in me and I'll show an interest in you - it shows you care about their needs, not just your own.

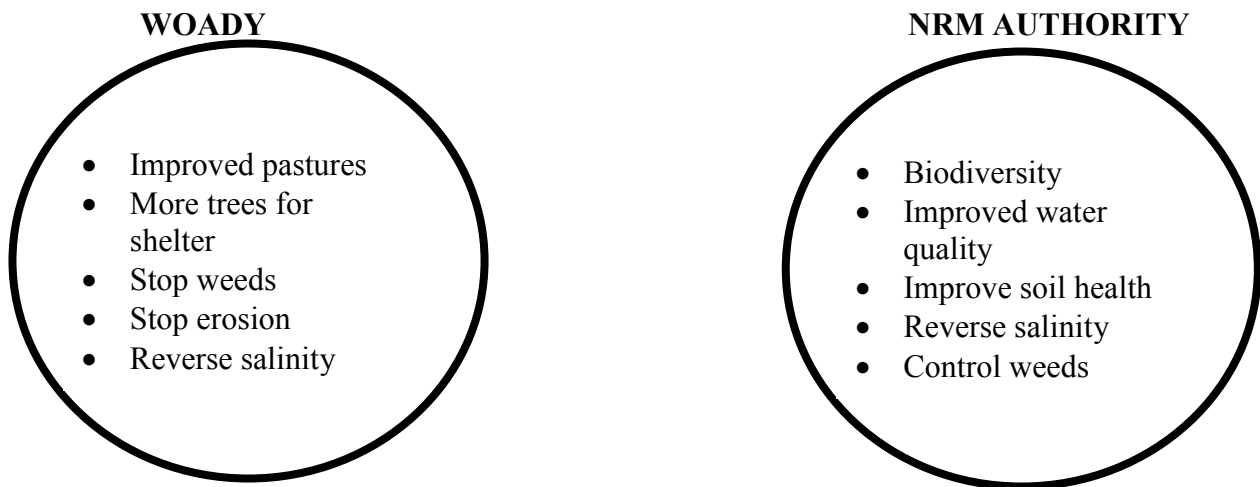
For the Woody Yaloak Catchment Project action has to happen on private land. If those private landholders are not engaged, then we're stuffed (and so are the NRM Authorities)!

There is a simple test if you get it wrong – people don't participate.

So do what it takes to link the science to the paddocks?

## Linking land managers and scientists/NRM Authorities

The key is to describe the outcomes, aspirations and objectives of each party. In Woody we think of them as two circles. For example:



### Where there is overlap – common objectives

Where there is overlap it should be easy because we both want the same result. It's just an exercise in how we deliver it, who delivers it and at what cost (even then we can make a mess of it).

A good example is the current salinity investment at Pittong.

- The area was identified through an asset / threat process (that was explained to the farmers),
- there was extensive investigation into groundwater to understand processes (reality check with the farmers).
- CSIRO Flowtube modelling was used to estimate the impacts of various treatments,
- we built farmers understanding and confidence in the treatment options through a study tour,
- paddock scale recharge maps we developed and discussed with landholders
- landholders invited to design the 'support package'.

The result has been 100% engagement.

The Sustainable Grazing of Saline Land (where we have 3 sites) is another example of this process working well.

### What if there isn't overlap?

If the activity is on our agenda but not Government we look for other supporters. In our experience they also want to be involved in the process, to develop their understanding of how their investment will make a difference in our catchment. Science has the same role, it informs and educates. Where we obtain the science can become an issue.

The pasture program, that has been run in various forms and now being supported by NLP, is a good example of using science eg soil testing, new species, herbicide manipulation, grazing techniques to good advantage. These programs are run by Woody Yalook in partnership with private industry and RIRC's.

More significant is the situation where it is not on Woody Yaloak's agenda but is on the NRM Authorities. Our experience shows that unless this is carefully managed, it can create unnecessary tension and fear, which in turn will compromise our ability to engage these land managers in the future. Everybody resents being told what you should be doing.

In these situations, the first step is to develop our level of comfort and understanding before we proceed. We will choose not to embrace new initiatives if the committee feel the leap of faith is too great and we will lose support. Biodiversity planning, total exclusion of stock from waterways, waterway crossing design, native grass retention and the suggestion that high nutrient loads are coming from the Woody Yaloak river are a few examples we are currently dealing with. We are undertaking a range of science based activities to develop this confidence.

The Woody Yaloak Committee is extremely good at constantly looking over their shoulders to make sure the rest of the catchment community is following. It is all too easy for a band of enthusiasts, who often fill committee positions, to be excited by new initiatives and forget the likely response of others. This approach often frustrates outsiders but I believe has been significant in our ongoing success. We undertake our own investigations and conduct our own trialing to develop our understanding and confidence in the proposed practice before embracing it.

The proposed toxic waste dump at Pittong was another example of no alignment with Government and local desires. Woody Yaloak played an important role in assembling the data we knew about the site, which was significantly more than the consultants engaged to assess the site knew. The information clearly showed this wasn't a suitable site. Eventually the site was excluded and we have no doubt the information we had help ally landholder fears and added to the decision to withdraw from Pittong.

### **Changing the content of the circles**

We have learnt that unless you are willing to engage in the formulation of the NRM circle the potential overlap will be diminished. Knowing what's happening in you catchment can help with this. Woody Yaloak have a 'standing agreement' with Ballarat University and the School of Mines in Ballarat to find research and investigation projects for a number of students each year. We put this to good use, investing our own money to develop *our* knowledge of *our* catchment. We can then use this knowledge to shape the various NRM strategies and plans. The CCMA have assisted in this, allowing Woody Yaloak to host two workshops as part of the Regional Catchment Strategy development.

A current example is the assessment of the waterways in our catchment. We don't feel the current description and priorities set for our catchment are adequate, so we are undertaking a 1 km waterways assessment of all reaches of the catchment. The process has been:

- designing the assessment process in partnership with the CCMA
- CCMA staff trains the students in assessment procedures.
- We store the information on our GIS (landholders feel more comfortable with who stores the data).
- We use scientific experts to help interpret the information, deciding what it means to us.
- The information is shared with the catchment community and the CCMA.

Invariably it changes the CCMA priorities in the catchment.

The Clarkesdale Bird Sanctuary is another example. This was a cleared block of farming land at Linton purchased by Gordon Clarke in the 60's and revegetated with a mix of native and exotic species. This site has been studied in detail to develop our understanding of the species diversity created by less favoured exotic species (compared to the common think at present that it must be local indigenous species to provide the desired biodiversity in the landscape). These results will question our assumption about the additional benefits (or lack of) associated with non indigenous plantings.

### **Conclusion**

The Woody Yaloak Catchment Group has had some good success at linking science to the paddock, however we have to be pro-active. We have come to accept that some programs that occur are conceived in good faith but are designed and implemented in ignorance. Science has a vital role to play and this includes the social science of how to engage and sustain involvement of a community. Science gives much more than answers, it develops confidence and reduces risk, two elements that are vital to sustain participation.