

Celebrating **10** years



WOODY ALOAK
Productive Catchment Management



Promoting productive catchment management

An ambitious beginning

Ten years ago, the Pittong, Werneth, Rokewood and Misery Moonlight landcare groups (in Victoria's Western district) joined forces, with the encouragement of the Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF), to develop a plan to accelerate the adoption of on-farm landcare solutions. The group formed the Woody Yaloak Catchment Project which was one of the first in Victoria to tackle land degradation on a whole catchment basis and the first of its kind to attract a major corporate sponsor, Alcoa of Australia Limited.

The initial project involved 80 landholders in the 120,000 hectares catchment south west of Ballarat. The community set out an ambitious five-year plan, managed by a local committee, to establish 3,500 hectares of deep rooted perennial pastures, plant 135,000 trees and decrease the rabbit population. This was achieved within a four-year time frame.

In developing their plan, the Woody Yaloak Catchment Project committee was determined to promote productive catchment management. It has become their catch cry and a measurable objective.

The key to sustainability

The Woody Yaloak Catchment group has recognised that participation is the key ingredient to continued success. Participation helps create ownership. The Woody Yaloak project enabled landholders to tackle projects of interest to them, such as productivity activities, which in turn built individual confidence to embrace other landcare works.

Neighbourhood groups

Recognising that community participation is important to success, a neighbourhood group approach was developed by the Woody Yaloak group and Ted Rowley, Alcoa of Australia's Landcare consultant in 1998.

A neighbourhood group involves between two and 12 landholders with common interests and concerns and in most cases, with adjoining properties.

According to landholder John Carr, the neighbourhood group concept is about doing things that are important to the individual but in consideration of others. "It gets more people talking to each other and involved and as a result, more on-ground activities."

Social interaction

"Through our neighbourhood groups, we have returned to the social interaction between neighbours that is so important. This is leading to meaningful contributions by people, sharing of experiences and skills.

"The result is lasting landscape change and ownership of our environmental challenges, concerns and solutions," said Alice Knight, past Chairman.

Neighbourhood groups develop a five-year plan which is forwarded to the executive committee to access appropriate funding.

The concept minimises paper work, administration and funding processes, and streamlines management. It also improves progress monitoring and reporting outcomes to funding bodies.



Measuring progress

After nearly 10 years of activity and investment of nearly \$2.6 million by landholders and a further contribution of \$1.8 million by partners, the Woody Yaloak Catchment Project has seen some encouraging outcomes. Importantly, in 2001, the group undertook a benchmark survey to measure change against three pre-determined outcomes.

Outcome 1 - Viable businesses

- > Gross farmer income increased from \$275/ha in 1990 to \$335/ha in 2001 mostly due to productivity improvements gained from pasture based activities conducted by the group.
- > Key productivity indicators included: a 33% increase in perennial pastures, use of better management practices (such as soil testing and minimum tillage), a 51% increase in fertiliser use, and improved fencing to allow for rotational grazing.
- > Support for productivity improvements included one-to-one technical advice, information sessions, farm walks and training courses.
- > In 1990, gross farmer income was 20% below the South West Monitor Farm Project average but by 2000 it was 10% above.

Outcome 2 - A strong community, capable of managing change

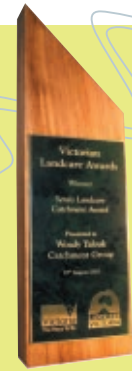
- > Ongoing community participation has remained at about 65% since 1993 – a significant increase from before the project began.

- > More than 20% of landholders have been members of the Woody Yaloak Executive Committee, 32% have contributed on sub-committees and 16% have hosted tours, field days or farm walks.
- > The project has increased neighbourhood integration from 15% in 1990 to 60% in 2000.

Outcome 3 - A natural environment that nurtures business viability and works with the capacity of the catchment

In areas where the Woody Yaloak Catchment Group has been active, the level of ongoing investment is strong. After a decade of activity the project has seen:

- > The area of private land in the catchment under trees increased from 0.8% to 2.4% (57% are blue gums and pines).
- > An average of 97ha of perennial pasture resown on the average farm.
- > The rabbit population significantly reduced.
- > More than 60ha of erosion treated through earthworks and the fencing of areas to exclude livestock.



Landcare recognises Woody's efforts

The Woody Yaloak Catchment Group's efforts in sustainable catchment management earned them the Sensis Victorian Landcare Award for 2003. The award recognises the outstanding achievements of volunteers promoting sustainable management of Victoria's natural resources.

The Woody group received the award based on their strong identification with Landcare covering the environmental, social and economic factors through their projects. Their plans were noted for being rich in catchment information and their integration efforts sophisticated. As well, the geographic information system (GIS) business innovation was considered particularly interesting and contemporary.

"All those involved in this project, including the landholders, sponsors, executive committee, staff and past chairs, Kevin and Alice Knight, should take an enormous deal of pride in what has been achieved. This has been a whole community effort, with everyone playing a vital part in its success. Congratulations to all involved," said Woody Yaloak Catchment Chairman Michael Rowe.

Keeping skills in the catchment

"Many landholders who are members of the Woody Yaloak Catchment have increased their productivity and profitability by managing their resources better," said local farmer Troy Missen. "If you never got off your property, you'd never discover better ways of improving your farm."

As a landholder for eight years, Troy always had an interest in improving productivity on his land and his enthusiasm increased with the financial support and knowledge to take action. Since joining the Woody Yaloak Catchment Project and recently becoming a part time staff member, Troy has renewed his passion for farming.

Skill development

"The project has given me the initiative to develop my skills and this has included the confidence to begin a Natural Resources Management Course."

Being involved in a large group has given me the opportunity to meet and share ideas with landholders both large and small. The project has also provided technical and financial assistance which has enabled us to do things on our land we couldn't have done before."

One of Troy's roles is to help landholders plan and manage their natural resources through the (GIS).

Membership of the Woody Yaloak community has also provided a catalyst for wider involvement in catchment management. Members have moved on to join the Catchment Management Authority board and implementation committees, as well as other regional organisations.

"It has given people the confidence to become involved in regional decision making," said Alice Knight.



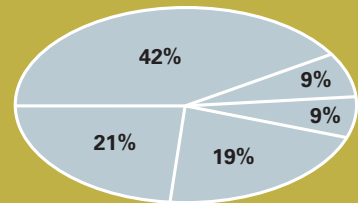
Breaking new ground through sponsor support



A vital component in the success of the Woody Yaloak Catchment Project has been the support of major sponsor Alcoa World Alumina Australia.

Alcoa approached the Victorian Farmers Federation 10 years ago looking for a partner catchment and Woody Yaloak has benefited from the company's continued support over that time.

Since 1990 Alcoa has committed around \$750,000 to the Woody Yaloak Catchment Project. The company has embraced the need for productivity as the means for ongoing sustainability.



Woody Sponsorship Support (1993-2002)

Alcoa	42%
Federal Government	21%
State Government	19%
Woody Yaloak Catchment Group*	9%
Corangamite Catchment Management Authority	9%

* Does not include \$1.5m in on-ground works funded by members.

As well, Alcoa has provided administrative support, so that landholders could develop the confidence to run a project of this size. Importantly, they provided support without the strings and allowed landholders to make their own decisions about what needed to be done.

"In Woody Yaloak, there was widespread willingness to work flexibly through the issues and complete faith that the community could build mutually beneficial partnerships to restore this economically and environmentally important eco-system," said Wade Hughes, one of the original members of the Alcoa Landcare Project Management Team, who has since gone on to manage Environmental Health and Safety Communication for Alcoa globally.

"When the eco-system includes multiple land uses ranging from nature conservation through to intensive agriculture, a systematic approach requires all the land users in the system to discover how to work together for the common good," said Wade Hughes.

Ted Rowley, Alcoa and international landcare consultant believes the Woody Yaloak group has the capacity together with its partners to be innovative in its approach to lead and support community change in natural

resource management to achieve the vision that they hold for the landscape and community they want for their grandchildren.

"The group has set both aspirational and technical goals for the natural things they value, they understand the threats to these and they are continually building their capacity to prioritise their actions to protect the most valued assets and be clear about the benefits and costs to this and the next generation.

Together we can achieve, together we can lead and together we can have back the natural things we took for granted until they were no longer there in the way we remembered."

Current Landcare Manager for Alcoa, Joan McGovern, agrees that the 10-year partnership with the Woody Yaloak Catchment Project has seen "our funding being put to the best use - for innovative activities that have been proven and then passed on to other Landcare groups around the country.

The GIS project is an excellent example of that. It is very much a value-adding process that allows farmers to plan their own works and to see across the boundaries and understand the implications from a much broader perspective.

We are proud to be associated with the catchment as it leads the way for others," said Joan.

Professional support is a key to success

Cam Nicholson has been the group's project officer since its beginning. He has brought strategic thinking and a professional approach, encouraging local landholders to 'have a go'. As a result almost 70% of farmers in the catchment are involved.

What progress have you seen in 10 years?

"The project has strengthened community capacity. With an emphasis on neighbourhood group planning and implementation, we have seen individuals become more willing to share information about their farm situation and the successes and failures of various actions they have tried.

There has been a growing recognition that most of the expertise required to solve these problems lies with the landholders in the community rather than outside it. Landholders have grown to take on the challenges of natural resource management and appreciation for the ways in which they live and farm within the catchment. For example planting trees in strategic locations on the landscape, creating shelterbelts and aiding in sustaining biodiversity, not just along their driveway.

A decade ago only a few landholders had the confidence to describe how they think natural resource management should be conducted in their area. Now they provide strong, rational arguments when sourcing funding, earning them a good reputation and respect. More importantly, this has provided a strong vehicle for future initiatives."

What are the key learnings?

- > **Ease of participation** – it is important to start where people are at and engage them in something they are interested in.
- > **Good leadership** – Woody's leaders take people with them encouraging people in the community to be proactive and respond to issues at a grass roots level.
- > **Dedicated staff** – employing people from within the catchment has been a priority so that local skills and knowledge are retained.
- > **Positive attitude** – the ability to stay positive and find alternative solutions has given us a growing advantage.

Family commitment

Kevin and Alice Knight have been central to the success of the Woody Yaloak Catchment Project. Their commitment and capacity to get things done has been an inspiration to others.

About Kevin

Kevin Knight was an original member of the catchment group committee, known as the 'gang of four' which included George McKenzie, Jim Boyle and Simon Caldwell.

Kevin's experience in local government has brought sound knowledge of policy and procedures to the group. Kevin's level headed nature has also helped to guide the group in managing projects with multiple sources of funding.

"One of Kevin's strengths is that he is not afraid to represent the belief of the people in the catchment and this has helped to build individual confidence and unite the community," said project officer Cam Nicholson.

Kevin says his experience with the project has reinforced a long held belief. "If we expect people to be interested in natural resource management, we also need to be interested in their issues. In this project many landholders wanted to improve their productivity so we had to embrace this at the same time. If we hadn't we would have lost their participation".

About Alice

Alice Knight is well known in the local community and beyond for her hospitality. Her ability to network, level of commitment and perseverance is a strength that has earned her a high degree of respect at all levels.

"In the early days," said Cam, "Alice would provide lunch when Kevin was coordinating meetings at their home. Due to the pair's level of professionalism and generosity, people would go away thinking this project is really special."

Alice became Catchment Committee Chair in 1998 and was influential in restructuring the executive committee in 2000 as the project increased in complexity. The committee now operates like a board of directors with four portfolio areas: Finance, Communication and Publicity, On Ground Works and Strategic Partnerships. The targeted structure now "ensures members are doing things they are confident in doing, to maintain their motivation to contribute", said Alice.

The outcomes of the Woody Yaloak Catchment Project have strengthened her resolve in investing in local communities. "If we are prepared to support our local communities in the way they wish to be supported, we can create a spirit and momentum that can solve any problem."

The next generation

According to Lex Hadler, the Woody Yaloak Catchment Project has "helped to save our farmland by changing the way we do things".

Lex has been conscious of landcare since he took over the original property from his father in 1956.

He is one of the original farmers involved in the Woody Yaloak Catchment Project.

Lex's son, Ross, believes that the Woody Yaloak Project has made a huge difference to his family's property.

"It has helped to control erosion and the rabbit population, as well as assisting in weed control, cleaning up our creek line and removing large patches of gorse, all of which has contributed to making our land more productive.

The project has taught me that anything is possible. We have made significant progress so let's hope that from here on more people get involved to continue to improve the catchment."



Landscapes for the Future

The Woody Yaloak Catchment Project has consistently explored innovative solutions towards achieving sustainable land and water resource management. One such innovation is *Landscapes for the Future*, which helps landholders plan the management of their natural resources and record the results.

Unlimited capability

Using a geographic information system (GIS), *Landscapes for the Future* enables a landholder to layer maps of local information, such as soil type and vegetation over their own farm on their own computer. It allows features such as erosion works, plantations and weed infestations to be drawn onto the maps, and project information such as site notes, photographs and fact sheets to be attached. The software also allows local, state and regional priorities to be included in the planning process. Landholders can enter their own information which is uploaded into the Project's GIS. At the same time, local works can be recorded and layered onto the GIS.

"The capacity of the GIS is only limited by our imagination," said Cam Nicholson. The system also offers video footage at sites to show panoramic views and to provide demonstrations of techniques.

The *Streets Ahead* software used in the package, was developed by Osprey Computing in Ballarat, with the landcare application

pioneered by the Woody Yaloak Catchment Project in partnership with Alcoa of Australia, Rick Pope of Land Victoria and the Corangamite Catchment Management Authority.

Widespread adoption

Since its launch in 2002, *Landscapes for the Future* has increased interest Australia-wide. The Mallee and Corangamite catchment management regions, as well as part of the Glenelg Hopkins, Upper Campaspe and other Victorian regions have adopted the tool for farm and group planning. Interest has also reached as far as Western Australia and Queensland.

Rick Galbraith, Natural Resource Management Officer with the Crows Nest Shire Council in Queensland has been using *Streets Ahead* software and found it to be an effective tool for developing Property Natural Resource Management Plans.

"There has been a great deal of interest from landholders who are keen to be able to access a GIS-based program for developing their individual property plans. The reporting capabilities of the program are a real asset for the administration of devolved grant projects that are operating in our catchment area.

We are moving towards requiring landholders to develop a property plan prior to accessing grant funds and *Landscapes for the Future* will assist us in this process," said Rick.

"We have been involved with the Woody Project right from the beginning, and have found that it has given us the confidence to try new ideas in pasture and stock management as well as tree planting. Alcoa's encouragement was also a tremendous enticement and motivator to try new methods.

Having Cam and his team to call on has been immeasurable, also the friendships and shared experiences of fellow members has been vital to the advances at Wurrook South."

Marion and Bill Walton, landholders near Rokewood

"The establishment of the Woody Yaloak Catchment Project has increased our understanding of how best to manage our land, water and vegetation. Indeed in many ways the project has led our thinking and actions.

Productivity and conservation considerations have been effectively integrated; clear objectives and targets set including indicators of overall catchment health.

Above all, the project has maintained the active involvement of the catchment community and of many partner organisations."

Bob Carrail, former member of the Victorian Farmers Federation, who organised the initial sponsorship deal with Alcoa.

Future visions

The Woody Yaloak Catchment Project has had a profound effect on the landscape. After a decade of tree-planting, minimising the impact of rabbits and continually improving pastures, the key lesson learned by landholders is that profitability and sustainability go hand in hand.

The backbone of the project has been through building a sustainable community focused on the implementation of productive catchment management practices.

Woody's success story has spread Australia-wide including being used as a best practice case study in *Securing the Future for Australian Agriculture*, 2003.

"Autonomous landcare networks such as Woody Yaloak attract corporate and private sector investment and play an effective intermediary role in balancing regional issues with local issues," said Brian Scarsbrick, Chief Executive, Landcare Australia.

"Ongoing support for these networks is essential if regional and catchment health natural resource targets are to be realistic," said Brian.

The next step...

Cam Nicholson describes a vision that the Woody Yaloak Project has for the next 10 years where they will evolve into an 'agent' delivering natural resource management and outcomes sought by a range of government and other bodies.

"Our group knows the people we're working with better than anybody else so it makes sense for us to encourage people to adopt different on-ground practices. I believe we need to capitalise on this as the next step forward.

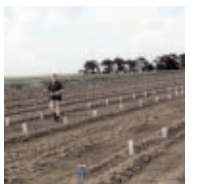
By the end of this decade we will see a vibrant catchment community, running highly profitable businesses but doing so within the capacity of the catchment to support these practices," said Cam.

Cam also sees the current distinction between conservation and productivity will disappear, with the grains, wool, meat and timber industries as major supporters of natural resource management on farms.

"Keeping landholders involved in all aspects of landcare and recognising individual potential has been the success of the catchment group. The evolution of neighbourhood groups has encouraged learning and decision making at a group level. It has enabled small groups to have a focused interest, consider problems, ask questions and make informed decisions.

The sense of community is extremely strong and social events are just as important as the business side of landcare. Woody has been successful because it has cared for the community as well as the land."

Claire Dennis, technical support officer, Greening Australia.





Special thanks to Alcoa of Australia for making this publication possible.

Real results

In less than a decade, John Carr has seen real progress in productive catchment management. The driving force behind this has been his active involvement in the project.

"Productivity and seeing on ground results has been the group's vision.

We wanted to be able to manage our resources so that we could leave the land in a better condition for the next generation. It was this guiding principal which struck a chord with many landholders and encouraged them to get involved."

John Carr, Rokewood

Woody Yaloak Catchment Area

Thank you to our sponsors...

- > Alcoa World Alumina Australia
- > Corangamite CMA
- > Natural Heritage Trust
- > Department of Primary Industries
- > Department of Sustainability and Environment
- > Wesfarmers Landmark
- > Meat and Livestock Australia, through the Sustainable Grazing Systems program
- > Golden Plains Shire
- > Landcare Australia Limited

- > Telstra Country Wide (via Landcare Australia Ltd)
- > Stephens Pasture Seeds
- > Gilllear Lime
- > Farmright Technical Services (soil testing).

...and product discount supporters

- > Hi Fert (fertilizer)
- > BHP Waratah (fencing)
- > DuPont (herbicides)
- > Hewitt & Whitty (equipment purchase).

"The Clarksdale Bird Sanctuary has developed a strong and productive partnership with the Woody Project. By tackling issues ranging from pasture productivity to bio-diversity the Woody project has engendered a strong sense of community among participants. A high level of innovation and outstanding results have been achieved.

Clarksdale is a member of two Neighbourhood Group projects, and is receiving funding for the statistical analysis of bird survey data collected on the Sanctuary. It is expected that the survey results will have implications for bio-diversity planning on Clarksdale and across the broader catchment."

David Coutts, ranger Clarksdale Sanctuary, near Linton



For more information go to www.woodyyaloak.com.au