

Woody Yaloak Catchment Group



Strategic plan (2019 - 2021)

Background

The Woody Yaloak Catchment Group has been operating since 1993, with the dual roles of enhancing farm productivity and the environment. During this period the Group have supported 226 individual landholders and nine community and school groups conduct on ground works worth \$13.3M (in 2019 dollars), along with numerous trials, workshops, walks and information sessions. The largest areas of expenditure have been in revegetation (45%), pasture improvement (26%), weeds (11%), rabbits (7%) and erosion control (4%). Since 2010, most investment has been in environmental rather than productivity based activities.

In the past five years there has been a noticeable decline in the number of people undertaking on ground works and the scale of those work. While membership remains steady, representing about 60% of the private land in the catchment, feedback from members indicates many feel they have completed their most pressing landcare projects. This is a major achievement and should be celebrated. However it does suggest there will not be large ongoing demand for traditional landcare activities from current Woody Yaloak members.

The world in which Landcare operates has also changed dramatically since 1993. Most farming groups did not exist when landcare started, there were few private advisors and financial support from Government and the private sector was substantial, in our case through Alcoa Australia. There was no social media and mobile phones were a novelty. Twenty five years later there are alternatives to landcare that compete for peoples time and sponsors money.

As the founding members of landcare age, there is a need to enrol the next generation to retain and continue the gains made over the past 25 years. Woody Yaloak's success was built on having the opportunity for the community to identify, design and implement activities they were passionate about. It is only fair that new leaders have the same opportunity to identify and design an approach they are committed to, as the initial members of landcare had back in 1993. After 25 years of operation, The Woody Yaloak Group need to embrace generational change to continue sustainable and productive management of our natural resources. This may be different to what we have now. As Charles Darwin wrote ...

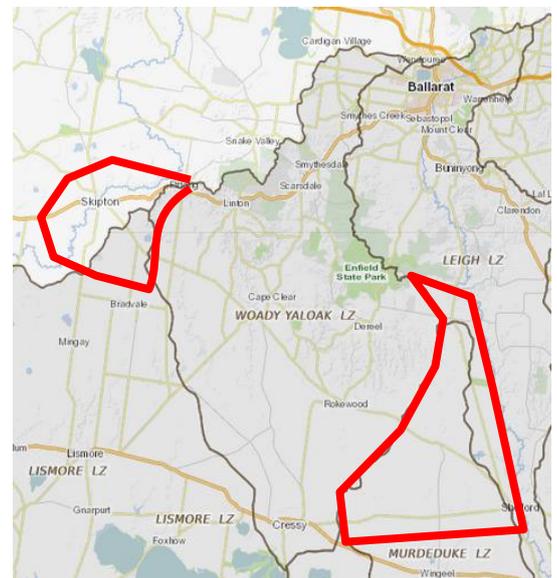
“It is not the strongest of the species that survives, not the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is the most adaptable to change.”

Development of the next strategic plan (2019 to 2021)

In late 2018 the Woody Yaloak Group conducted a series of meetings and phone conversations with younger landholders in the catchment to identify and design a strategy to engage the next generation of landcarers. The consultation phase was supported by the Golden Plains Shire Community Grants Program.

The key directions from these consultations were:

1. Want to improve their knowledge and skills in **pastures, soils and livestock**. It was felt to offer value, Woody needed to work in an area where there was a lack of confidence in adopting the latest technology and practices. Crops advice was well covered, as were many technology developments.
2. **Traditional landcare practices** (e.g. tree planting, weed and rabbit control etc) remain important but most believe they have enough skill and capacity to undertake these works without support. If support is required they would apply independently.
3. People **don't want to be on a committee that is directly responsible for finances and employment**, however they do want the opportunity to set the direction on activities. Where possible financial and people resourcing would be provided by alternative or associate organisation.
4. **Expand the Woody Yaloak boundary** to areas where there is interest in pastures, soils and livestock, but are inadequately serviced by landcare. These are the farming areas to the west of Pittong (around Skipton) and to the east of Rokewood (to Shelford). Landholders in these areas have the same common interest but are currently limited in their participation by historic boundaries.



5. Want to strengthen the association with **Southern Farming Systems** and the **private advisory sector**. Many landholders already engage with them, so we need to work in partnership rather than compete. They may also bring additional resources and expertise.

6. Future **landholder engagement** needs to match new methods of communication. Social media is the foundation (Facebook, twitter, webinars), with less interest in newsletters, night meetings and social gatherings.
7. Modify the **committee structure** and membership to be more based on skills rather than geographic representation and to capitalise on technology e.g. Skype meetings.

This direction, if implemented, would have significant implications for the current operation of the Woody Yaloak Catchment Group. The ramifications include:

1. The focus would be on productivity based activities rather than traditional landcare activities like tree planting, weed and rabbit control. This means traditional landcare activities would no longer be supported by the Woody Yaloak Group. Individuals would need to act and apply for funding independently.
2. The watershed boundary that has defined the Group since 1993 (and influenced eligibility for support) would no longer apply.
3. Members would get increased access to the expertise, resourcing, staffing and governance from Southern Farming Systems and consultants rather than advice being provided from within the Woody Yaloak Group.
4. Recruitment and operation of the executive committee would change. A committee that does not take responsibility for their own operation means:
 - a. Banks accounts would be closed and any accumulated funds after current obligations have been met would need to be dispersed (as would any plant and equipment)
 - b. ABN and DGR status would be relinquished
 - c. Staff would be redundant unless they are engaged by any new partner
 - d. They could only act in an advisory role.
5. Traditional communication and events would change, replaced by a scaled up social platform for communication and engagement and short sharp paddock events .
6. Recognising the new focus and structure would not be appealing to smaller block owners, who seek and value local information and support around traditional landcare.

This group of landholders, while only making up a small proportion of overall membership, may feel abandoned with the proposed changes.

7. Existing contractual arrangements on current projects would still need to be completed by the legal entity known as the Woody Yaloak Catchment Group. The last of these is due for completion in December 2020, so the group would need to exist in some legal form until then.

The executive committee discussed the findings and decided to send a letter to all Woody Yaloak Catchment Group members seeking feedback on the suggested change. The responses could be grouped as follows;

1. Supportive (the majority). Acknowledge the Woody Yaloak Catchment Group have achieved a lot and interest in diminishing. They recognise this is the best chance of keeping the next generation engaged with a refocus on productivity. It was felt member interest may swing back to more traditional landcare projects at a later date if people are engaged in their current interests now.
2. Disappointed but understanding. Concerned the eye may be taken off the ball around progress than has been made in landcare, especially controlling rabbits and weeds.
3. Have reservations, as it is not what they believe landcare should be. These views mainly came from small block owners who value the traditional landcare expertise and support more than productivity advice.

Given the suggested changes, the Executive Committee approached Southern Farming Systems to gauge their willingness for a closer association. Discussions were very positive around issues of providing technical expertise, establishing trial, skills training and facilitation support (using ex Woody Yaloak staff). They would also accept the legal and financial responsibility transitioning the Woody Yaloak Group to operate as a branch of SFS. The branch would meet twice a year to set and review direction and activities, which would include the use of any transferred funds.

On this basis the Executive Committee decided to develop a three year strategic plan that would meet the direction identified from the consultation.

The three year Strategic Plan

The 2019 – 2021 Strategic Plan has been developed by taking into account:

- A recognition of the changing operating environment landcare now operate in. This includes:
 - declining demand for traditional landcare activities,
 - less community interest in taking responsibility for fund raising and legal obligations around employment and governance,
 - alternative groups people can join which means people have to choose,
 - increasing difficulty in attracting funding, especially to fund projects the community want to do, and
 - changed methods of social engagement.
- The need to engage and foster leadership with younger landholders into landcare. Passionate leaders are essential to sustain any organisation and the current landcare model is unattractive to many next generation people in the catchment. New operating structures are required.
- Being active where interest lies. Landholders consulted clearly indicated a desire to focus on productivity based issues (which was no different to first 5 year plan created in 1993 by the previous generation). It would be swinging back to a focus the group had in the late 1990's and early 2000's.

In the next three years the Woody Yaloak Catchment Project will implement the following:

1. Design and implementation of a new management structure

Transitioning to a new management structure will require significant changes to the current operation of the Woody Yaloak Group. There are legal obligations to be met and it will take time to .

Theme	Action	Timeframe
<i>Informing members of proposed changes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memorandum of understanding with Southern Farming Systems complete • Proposed changes sent to all current financial members (2019/2020) • Conduct Q & A meetings with members to work through any issues of concern. 	Feb 2020 Feb 2020 Mar 2020
<i>Voting on new strategic plan</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New strategic plan presented and voted on at Special General Meeting (SGM) by all eligible members (in person or proxy) 	Apr 2020
<i>Completion of existing projects</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fast track the completion of projects with contractual obligations 	Nov 2020
<i>Winding up the existing legal entity (if motion is passed)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If a motion to transition the Woody Yaloak Group to a new structure is passed (by majority at SGM), then undertake winding up of legal entity. • Complete transfer / archiving of Woody Yaloak information from website 	Dec 2020 Oct 2020

2. Develop a new SFS Woody Yaloak branch action plan

Details around possible productivity issues have not been finalised, as this is best done when the strategic plan has been adopted and a new group of landholders engaged.

Theme	Action	Timeframe
<i>Branch co-ordination</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appoint a branch co-ordinator 	May 2020
<i>Recruitment of new Woody Yaloak branch of SFS</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Members invited to join an advisory group of the Woody Yaloak branch of SFS 	Jun 2020
<i>Planning and action</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct planning events to set direct for activities. Commence identified activities 	Aug 2020 Sep 2020

3. Support for smaller landholders

The proposed changes provide little appeal or support to landholders on smaller blocks. It would be unfair to implement these changes without providing alternative support.

Theme	Action	Timeframe
<i>Find alternative support for small block owner</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commence discussions with the Leigh Catchment Group and Bunanyung Alliance. Develop an alternative agreement to support small landholders 	Feb 2020 Aug 2020
<i>HorseCare through Landcare</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore the opportunity to transfer the ownership and operation of HorseCare through Landcare (currently owned by the WYCG) to a third party. 	