Woady Yaloak
Catchment Group

Five year action plan (2014 - 2018)
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Background

The Woady Yaloak Catchment covers 120,000 ha, with approximately 80% privately owned and 20% under public management. The private land is mainly used for agriculture, with grazing and cropping the dominant enterprises. Very little remnant vegetation remains on private land. Survey results show that average farm size has increased by about 10% in the last decade to 825 ha, while farm labour also increased slightly. The public land is largely forested and used for commercial timber production or conservation.

There are 339 km of main waterways in the Catchment and water from the area flows into Lake Corangamite, which is Australia’s largest permanent inland lake and is a waterbody of international significance for wildlife conservation. In 2013 most of these waterways were rated as being in very poor (19%), poor (26%) or moderate (40%) condition.

Soil erosion and secondary salinity are considered the two biggest threats to public assets because of their proximity to waterways, roads and high value native vegetation. Erosion and salinity also have an impact on private assets by reducing the capacity of the land to support agriculture. Rabbits and weeds are ongoing threats, affecting vegetation, waterways and farm production.

Whilst the predominant use of private land is for commercial farming, there is a growing population of smaller lifestyle properties, particularly at the headwaters of the catchment who live within easy commuting distance to Ballarat. This is illustrated by population density: in the Haddon Smythesdale area in the north of the Catchment the population density is 0.33 people/ha, whereas in the southern, predominantly agricultural areas of the Catchment the population density is 0.02 people/ha.

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i. Survey results
ii. Most of these waterways were rated as being in very poor (19%), poor (26%) or moderate (40%) condition.
iii. Erosion and salinity also have an impact on private assets by reducing the capacity of the land to support agriculture.
iv. Rabbits and weeds are ongoing threats, affecting vegetation, waterways and farm production.
Growth in household numbers has increased at a much greater rate in the Haddon Smythesdale area compared to the rest of the catchment. In the 10 years from 2001 to 2011, the number of households in the Haddon Smythesdale area increased by 16.8%, compared to a 7.4% increase in households in the lower part of the catchment (Central West)\(^\text{v}\).

There are currently 7 landcare groups in the catchment, an increase from 4 groups in 1993 and the Ballarat Environment Network. The level of activity of these groups has varied, with many groups less active than they were in the 1990's.
The Woady Yaloak Catchment Group and its achievements

The Woady Yaloak Catchment Group formed in 1993 with the aim of achieving:

- Viable businesses
- A strong community capable of managing change
- A natural environment that nurtures businesses operating within the capacity of the catchment
- Protection of remaining flora and fauna.

This required actions to remove threats to the environment and businesses but also involved improvement to the existing natural resources. In the past 20 years landholders have undertaken more than $9.8 million worth of projects directly funded by the Woady Yaloak Catchment Group. The majority of these costs being borne by landholders (in excess of $5.8 million). However this is only a small part of what is invested in landcare throughout the catchment. Survey results show landholders are spending $16 on landcare type activities in 2013 for each $1 received in grants.

Key indicators against the four aims indicates progress is being made:

- Farm profit and farm equity, two important indicators of business sustainability, have increased in the past decade. Whilst the increases are not large (average profit increase of 9% and equity of 13%), the direction is positive, despite increases in area farmed, and the cash flow and liquidity challenges facing many farming operations around Australia.

- Over the twenty year history of Woady, 90% of farms have been involved in projects at some stage. The annual participation rate of farmers in the Project remains high, with the long term average at 58% of private land managed by Woady Group members.

- Improvements to the natural resources including:
  - More than 11,000 ha of pasture improvement, equal to 11% of private land in the catchment.
  - Major changes in soil condition, with an estimated investment above maintenance of $23.3 million in fertiliser and $5.2 million in lime
  - A net positive increase in stream condition in 2013 compared to 2004, with 73% of sites recording an increased score.
  - 900 ha or 73% of saline land in the catchment treated, with 240 ha sown to salt tolerant species.
- 3,000 hrs of erosion control work undertaken.
- 7,600 litres of chemical used to treat weed infestations, eg. gorse, spiny rush, serrated tussock.
- 28 on farm trials investigating responses to fertiliser, lime, biological products, herbicides and pasture species

- Improvements in flora and fauna including:
  - Protection of 34 ha of native remnant vegetation
  - Revegetation with 800,000 trees, resulting in a doubling of the area of trees and shrubs on private land
  - Management recommendations for 78 native vegetation sites on private land (613 ha).

Public and private investors have been a vital contributor to this activity, including contributions of more than $4 million dollars with $900,000 over 15 years from Alcoa, $400,000 from private sponsors and industry bodies and $2.7 million for works and staffing from Federal, State and Local Government.

The focus of landcare activity has changed little over time. The first 5 year plan (1993 to 1998) had four programs: Pasture improvement, tree planting, rabbit/weed eradication and improving salinity/erosion areas. Subsequent 5 year plans have continued these issues, but have expanded into soil improvement, waterway enhancement and remnant protection.
Development of the next 5 year plan (2014 to 2018)

The development of the next 5 year plan has sought opinion from across the Woady Group membership including:

- Three landholder planning workshops facilitated by Martin Noonan (Oct 2013).
- Results of intentions from the outcomes survey (May 2013).
- Executive committee review and discussion.

Planning workshop insights

- Issues listed by all landholder groups (in priority order), ie. catchment wide issues:
  - Weed control, wider community participation through continuation of landcare, soil improvement, tree cover and protection, pest control.

- Issues listed by groups in the broadacre farming areas (in priority order):
  - Pasture improvement, crop improvement.
  - Erosion, wider community education, land use planning to support family farms and manage urban encroachment, consumer benefits, innovative practices.

- Issues listed by the groups in smaller block area (in priority order):
  - Management and responsibilities of small block owners, waterway management, greater government intervention and infrastructure planning, management of mullock heaps.
Outcome survey insights

- The greatest areas of future interest to the managers of larger farms were:

  ![Bar Chart]

  - Farm productivity
  - Soil health
  - Weeds
  - Rabbits/Foxes
  - Revegetation
  - Waterway enhancement
  - Erosion
  - Landclass fencing
  - Salinity

- Their greatest objective for farmers was to reduce debt through increased profit.

- The biggest challenges in reducing debt were rising costs, how to respond to climate variability, price variability and time/labour constraints.

- A frequent comment made by survey participants was that the most important thing for the Woady Yaloak Catchment Group to do was "to increase my knowledge and keep me motivated and involved".

- Landcare remains the key mechanism for providing information, awareness and support in relation to natural resource management in the catchment.

Executive Committee Insights

- A review of current of the current model of Landcare needs to be undertaken, with a view to possibly refining the model, so that the Woady Yaloak Catchment Group and the supporting landcare groups remain relevant and continue to operate effectively and efficiently into the future.
The Five Year Action Plan

Priorities in the 2014 - 2018 five year action plan have been developed by taking into account:

- The interests and aims (issues) of the Woady Yaloak Community
- The way the community would like to see the issues addressed
- Whether the issues are shared across the catchment or are more locally based
- The current and anticipated capacity of the Woady Yaloak Catchment Group to support these actions within 5 years or longer.

The Woady Yaloak accept all of the ideas collected are important, however some of the issues identified require longer term thinking and action and so may not appear in this five year plan (see appendix). These items are no less important to the Woady Yaloak Executive Committee and will be addressed in the Executive Committee’s longer term planning.

In the next five years the Woady Yaloak Catchment Project will address the following topics:
1. Weed control

Weed control is the issue of greatest concern across the Catchment. The severe impact that weeds can have across property boundaries, along roadsides and following waterways makes this an issue that affects all landholders, irrespective of size, enterprise and location.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Action</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coordinated approach to weed control</td>
<td>Develop a five year weed responsibility plan that deals with:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Roadsides – Work in partnership with the Golden Plains Shire and local Country Fire Authority Brigades. Identify problem areas and plan for combined action.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Public Land Managers – Involve the Golden Plains Shire, Department of Environment and Primary Industries, Ballarat Environment Network and Parks Victoria. Identify problem areas and encourage action to support community efforts on adjoining land.</td>
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<td>- Private Land Managers - Clarify responsibilities and reasonable expectations for all land owners (including absentee land owners). Identify what support is needed for pasture and crop weeds, e.g. identification and control methods.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Compliance – Develop a clear understanding of the steps to trigger compliance.</td>
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<td>Provide greater weed identification, education and advice</td>
<td>Incorporate topical articles on weed control and identification in the newsletter and on the Woady Yaloak Catchment Project website.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Develop and/or collate useful weed identification tools, to be made available at Woady Yaloak Group functions/events.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Focus on major weeds (e.g. spiny rush, gorse, blackberry, serrated tussock, broom), plus emerging problems (e.g. Texas Needlegrass, Fleabane and South African Weed Orchid).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Labour to support weed control activities</td>
<td>Review how best to support the labour component of weed projects, this may include financial incentives, particularly to support the use of contractors, which is advantageous in terms of the knowledge, efficiency and compliance with which works can be completed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding</td>
<td>Continue to seek funding opportunities to encourage community and individual action, e.g. Gorse Task Force Funding and private companies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing weeds on mullock heaps and mine sites</td>
<td>Investigate the implications of heritage issues in relation to weed control activities on mullocks and around mines. Research appropriate weed control strategies for these areas, including revegetation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Wider community participation through continuation of landcare

There is widespread support for the Woady Yaloak Catchment Group to continue providing a leadership and motivational role in keeping current landholders active in landcare, attracting new members and continue to create new learning opportunities.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ensure the that Landcare framework is the most appropriate</td>
<td>Revisited the current landcare group / catchment group relationship to ensure the structure is relevant and effective (as several landcare groups in the catchment have become less active in the past decade)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expanding communications methods</td>
<td>Explore the provision of online services and information, including social media as a tool for promotion and education.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Improve the look and functionality of the Woady Yaloak Catchment Project website.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Continue to conduct catchment tours, make comment on appropriate strategies and plans and promote the Woady Yaloak Catchment Group through various media outlets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve awareness of Landcare</td>
<td>Raise local awareness about Landcare and improve accessibility for potential new participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development and distribution of Information packs</td>
<td>Work with the Shire to improve the profile of Landcare in information packs distributed to new landholders, with the aim of raising awareness about Landcare and providing some education about land management issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Develop a more targeted information pack to present to landholders who make direct enquiry about joining Landcare.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continue with local on farm events</td>
<td>Continue to provide regular opportunities for farmers to come together to learn: field days, seminars and farm walks are valued learning opportunities within the Woady</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and trials
Yaloak farming community.
Develop a number of soil/landuse trials in the top of the Catchment, targeted toward the interests of small block owners.

Continue to provide social/educational opportunities for landholders
Provide opportunities for landholders to come together to learn and socialise, e.g. Woady Gatherings, field days, guest speakers, etc. Continue to encourage/invite non-members to join in. Topics of interest that members have indentified that could be explored at such events include climate variability, climate change land use planning, health, economics, succession planning, stewardship and job satisfaction.

Continue relationships with universities and schools to conduct research and investigations.
3. Soil improvement, pastures and crops

There is an inter-relationship between soil improvement and what is grown on the soil.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conducting farming trials</td>
<td>Conduct farm trials in the areas of:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Fertiliser, lime and other biological products to enhance soil and subsoil condition</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Suitable pasture species and their associated grazing management</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Suitable crops and their associated management (species, herbicides, tillage)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Suitable rotations for the farming system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstration of appropriate practices to landholders with small blocks</td>
<td>Develop a suite of practices that achieves the aims of landholders with small blocks e.g. pastures to feed horses, weed management, options without herbicides or inorganic fertiliser, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Revegetation

Revegetation remains a catchment wide interest and the level of activity is heavily dependent on funding to offset the fencing and tree costs. With the emphasis of Government programs on protection, we need to seek new ways to support tree planting.

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regional plan for revegetation</td>
<td>Encourage the Corangamite Catchment Management Authority to develop a regional revegetation plan (involving other landcare networks) that may be more attractive to corporate and philanthropic funding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding</td>
<td>Continue to seek funding to support tree planting and remnant protection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice and information</td>
<td>Collate relevant information in relation to the benefits, risks, best practice and appropriate species for revegetation projects and make available to members.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Undertake ground truthing of species performance by conducting a survey of members: use landholder experience to identify species that perform well in particular areas/conditions.</td>
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### 5. Pest control

The main pests in the Catchment are rabbits and foxes. The prevalence of these and the level of community concern (and action) varies from year to year. The Woady Group is well placed to continue with ongoing pest control programs as needed.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maintain existing rabbit control equipment</td>
<td>Ensure the 4 bait layers and ripper owned by the Woady Yaloak Catchment Group for rabbit control work are well maintained and readily available for use by members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinated approach in target areas</td>
<td>Develop an annual pest responsibility plan which deals with roadsides, public land, private land and absentee landholders. The plan will be based on acceptable / unacceptable threshold levels set by all stakeholders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual monitoring</td>
<td>Conduct annual monitoring of rabbit and fox populations in designated areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinated baiting</td>
<td>Conduct coordinated rabbit and fox baiting programs when populations are above threshold levels. Provide support for landholders who do not have the skills and/or appropriate qualifications to undertake baiting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding</td>
<td>Continue to seek funding opportunities to encourage group and individual action, with the resources to be used for coordination and to offset the cost of baits.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 1: Issues of importance that require longer term thinking or that the Woady Group does not currently have the capacity to support

A lot of important issues and valuable ideas were raised during the Planning Workshops and in the Outcomes Survey. However, within the current constraints of time and finance that surround this five year plan, the Woady Yaloak Group is unable to address all of these topics, at this time.

The topics that are not included in the current plan are no less important; they have been documented and will form the basis of longer term planning efforts by the Woady Yaloak Catchment Executive Committee.

Higher priority issues specific to particular parts of the Catchment:

- Salinity
- Erosion
- Better water quality/resources, waterway rehabilitation and enhancement
- Marketing, health benefits of clean/green product, crops to suit consumer needs
- Innovation with pest control, alternative crops, minimum tillage and direct drilling
- Rubbish dumping.
Appendix 2: Mission, desired outcomes and operational beliefs of the Woady Yaloak Catchment Group

Mission Statement

To motivate and enable landholders and the wider community to improve the productive, environmental and social well being of the Woady Yaloak catchment and its people.

Desired outcomes

The desired outcomes are:
- Viable businesses
- A community capable of engaging and managing change
- Businesses and lifestyles that operate within the capacity of the catchment
- Protection and enhancement of the natural resources in the catchment

Operational beliefs

The operation of the Woady Yaloak Catchment Group is based on the following beliefs:
- Landscape change will only be achieved if the majority of landholders choose to participate and to contribute their own resources, skills and time
- Voluntary participation needs to be sustained over many decades
- The cost of landscape change should be shared by those who gain benefit from the improvement, both landholders and the public
- Investment in activities that enables an individual to continue to meet that cost is legitimate
- Production and conservation activities are linked and are not mutually exclusive
- ‘Having a go’ and sharing the results of these actions with others is the best way to gain skills, confidence and drive innovation
- Respecting the interests of an individual is as equally important to address as the priorities of a third party as this sustains a relationship
- The easier it is to participate, the more likely an individual will commit.

Trends in waterway condition in the Woady Yaloak Catchment (2004 to 2013)

Corangamite Soil Health Strategy (2006 - 2012)

Statistics sourced from Profile ID, www.profile.id.com.au

Statistics sourced from Profile ID, www.profile.id.com.au

Trends in soil condition in the Woady Yaloak Catchment (1993 to 2012)