

Landcare good for business and wildlife

Holbrook Landcare recently took a bus load of local landowners, members and funding partners around some of the farms that the Bushlinks project has been working with over the past 4 years. Slopes2Summit Bushlinks was a vegetation connectivity project funded by the Australian Government's Biodiversity Fund in 2011. The project manager Kylie Durant said that "the highly successful project has worked with over 90 farmers to restore 1220ha of native vegetation on productive working farms in the region".

The tour took in sites around Holbrook and Gerogery, with the farmers talking about why they agreed to the project, what it means in real terms and how it fits into their farm business models.

The obvious benefits of shelter for livestock, subdivision and management advantages, erosion and sensitive land management were highlighted, as well as the benefits of "leaving the place better than we got it".

"This was a great way to end a great project that was able to work with landholders to achieve larger scale projects that are just not possible with many of the short-term funding cycles" said Kylie Durant, who hosted the bus tour. "The project gets biodiversity outcomes for the wider community, and there is direct benefit to local communities and economies also. The majority of the \$1.4M invested on farms supports local fencing material suppliers and contractors, as well as the individual farm businesses."

Key Messages of the day were

- Revegetation benefits outweigh the costs – even with the pest and weed control required the evidence shows less fox predation on lambs, less insects in crops, better stock health through shade and shelter and better water quality.
- Revegetation must fit into the farm business – fencing of creeks, erosion gullies and other sensitive, less-productive land is a no-brainer. Combining this with a pasture improvement program and using the smaller paddocks to get better pasture utilisation means that in most cases no productivity is lost, and you don't have the costs of degradation.
- You don't lose the land – for the larger revegetation areas, it remains a resource on the farm that you are managing for dual outcomes. In most of the management agreements areas may be grazed again to some extent after 5 years or so and form a useful and strategic "paddock" with good shelter.

A single project contributes to change in the landscape but there is now evidence that the cumulative investments are paying off and there are real changes in the vegetation cover in some of our sub-catchments – up to 15% in some cases as shown by recent analysis by the Murray Local Land Services.

The biodiversity benefits to the farm and the wider community are being monitored in the NSW Southwest slopes through the long-term ecology project at ANU (www.longtermecology.com), and the scientists are telling us that there is definitely a positive effect of revegetation on some of our woodland birds and other wildlife.

Kylie Durant for Holbrook Landcare Network, hosting the Bushlinks Road trip!



Host Simon Finlay of “Stonehaven” telling the bus tour about the 140ha of revegetation and restoration that they have done on farm and how it fits with their plans for the future.

