

Murrumbidgee Landcare's Cross Property Planning project

Land holder case study: Stephen and Sarah Palmer, Book Book

Name:	Stephen and Sarah Palmer
Location:	"Kyeamba Downs", Book Book
Property size:	1,214 ha
Farming enterprises:	Livestock - sheep and Angus cattle
Soil types:	Alluvial at the front, granite out the back
Rainfall:	700 mm

How long have you been farming in the area?

I [Steve] grew up on the property, but we've been in charge for 42 years.

How long have you been interested in natural resource management (NRM)?

About 20 years.

What first got you interested in NRM?

Sarah was probably the main driver - she has always been interested in that side of things.

Lyn Retief inspired us quite a bit, and through her we got involved in our first project, which was with Greening Australia. We had an area that had been cleared in the 60's, and had since developed five big gullies. It was very hard to muster in there, so we fenced it off - we actually fenced off an area of 70 hectares. It started to regenerate, and has repaired really effectively since then.

What are some of the environmental improvements you have completed, and what led you to undertake these projects?

Following on from our big gully project, we started planting a lot of tree corridors, and also fencing out the creeks. More recently we've planted bigger tree blocks, in addition to the corridors. We've now planted well over 20,000 trees and shrubs on our property.

Why did you join Murrumbidgee Landcare's Cross Property Planning (CPP) project?

It allowed us to keep doing the Landcare work we are interested in doing, and we liked the idea of being able to join our plantings up with those of our neighbours.

What work have you completed as part of the CPP project?

Initially we undertook St John's wort weed management. We have a paddock which is around 103 hectares that had been invaded by St John's wort, meaning we were unable to graze it. We sprayed the wort in late 2012 and again in April the next year, and then sowed it to oats. We repeated the process the following year, then the next year we were able to sow it to pasture. Hills are difficult for chemical and mechanical control, so using this technique we were able to slow down the growth and spread of St John's wort to a point where it is now virtually gone. We can continue to keep it under control, and we are able to use grazing management to give the pastures a chance to compete against the wort.

As a separate part of the project, we fenced off and revegetated three areas of erosion, to stabilise them and link in with existing native vegetation on our property.



Above: An established tree line on the Palmer's property

Have you noticed any benefits (expected or unexpected) from your NRM work through the CPP project?

We've found that while we have fenced out quite a few hectares, it hasn't impacted on our stocking rates. So we are getting the benefits of the erosion stabilisation, shelter and shade, without losing production.

Have you changed any aspects of your management as a consequence of the things you have learnt through being a part of the CPP project?

We don't set stock anymore, except for joining, which was a big change.

We've also made our paddocks smaller, and put in more laneways, so we can move the stock around a lot easier. Overall this has really improved our management.

What are your 'keys to success' when undertaking NRM work?

I think ownership of the project is really important. The landholder who receives the funding should be the one planning the work, and doing the work. You have far more commitment to a project that way, compared to a project where people come in and decide what to do, where to do it, and then provide contractors to do it for you.

Are there any changes you've made that you would do differently in hindsight?

No!

Do you have any remaining NRM concerns that you would like to work on?

We still have one project that we'd like to do - we want to fence off a gully in an area of native tea-tree.

I think we have our paddock sizes right now, and all the other gullies on the property are fenced off - so we just need to keep on top of any new gully erosion which forms!