

Murrumbidgee Landcare's Cross Property Planning project

Land holder case study: Lawrie and Nicole Sykes, Humula

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| Name: | Lawrie and Nicole Sykes |
| Location: | "Miowera", Humula |
| Property size: | 1,500 ha |
| Farming enterprises: | Beef cattle, fat lambs and wool |
| Soil types: | Shale to heavy loams |
| Rainfall: | 700 mm |

How long have you been farming in the area?

All my life - I grew up here.

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

I suppose about 25 years.



Above: A magnificent view over the hills of "Miowera"



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What first got you interested in NRM?

Seeing what other people had done was probably what first got me thinking about it. And I think just knowing that something needed to be done to help the sustainability of the property.

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

Most of the work we've done has centred around erosion control. We've also put some tree lots in, and put in a fair amount of perennial pastures.

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

I guess because it sounded interesting, and we liked the idea of the cross-property networking. You don't realise the connectivity of everything until someone explains it to you, but it's so important. For instance, in the paddocks adjacent to a forestry lot we had fenced off, we didn't have any red-legged earth mites, while the neighbours were really struggling with the mites, even after spraying them. We found that the reason was because the birds which were in the trees were eating the mites and controlling them for us!

What work did you complete as part of the CPP project?

We fenced off two large areas around some major gully erosion. We did some earthworks to fill in the eroded areas, and then planted around the gullies.

We designed it so that we fenced off enough country on the sides and head of the gully to allow pasture growth, a lesson we learnt from previous gully work. When you fence off a larger area of the paddock, it allows you to use that area for grazing in the future. You can control the grazing because of the fences, and the smaller paddock can be a useful tool in your livestock management.



Above: Lawrie standing on an area of gully erosion which was fenced and revegetated through the CPP project in mid-2016, and is already showing signs of stabilising



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

We've seen a reduction in weeds from the work. Also we've definitely noticed an increase in native wildlife, particularly birds.

Has any aspect of your management changed as a consequence of being part of the CPP project?

We've changed our fencing and grazing management, which has allowed us to control the livestock better and manage our pastures better.

We've also learnt the importance of the connection between native wildlife and pastures and native timber.

I think the main thing we've learnt is that you just need to be sustainable.

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

Do it properly, and do it once!

It's imperative to rip and spray for seedling growth success, and to plant the seedlings as early as you can in winter to give them a chance to establish before summer hits.

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

We wouldn't plant just eucalypts and other trees in a gully; these days we would definitely include shrubs in our plantings.

We wouldn't fence off an area of gully erosion without doing any earthworks - and we wouldn't do earthworks in spring!

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

Weed control is still a big problem, and costs the industry a lot. At the moment our main problems are with erodium, corkscrew and silver grass.

We'll continue to do more earthworks and gully erosion control, and will also put in more perennial pastures. We still have plenty to do!



Above: Lawrie (second from left), with fellow landholders Martyn Tapfield, David Tooke and Mary Nicholls, and CPP Project Officers Nicole Maher and Jacinta Christie