

DEALING WITH EROSION AT “WADDON”, TARCUTTA

The significant environmental improvements made by Peter and Janine McCallum

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Peter McCallum has been a member of the Tarcutta Valley Landcare Group since 1994, and has also been on the Executive (either as President or Treasurer) since that time, making him one of the Group’s most long-standing and valuable members. Yet it isn’t just the success of Landcare in the Valley that Peter has been working towards; together with his family, Peter has been making incredible improvements to his own property. In this article, Peter shares with us some insights into the changes they have made on their property and the effect these have had on productivity and sustainability.

Peter and Janine McCallum have been farming beef cattle in the Tarcutta Valley for 19 years. Their 784 acre property, “Waddon”, ranges from rocky hills to alluvial flats, but it is the areas around the Tarcutta Creek that have been the focus of much of their attention for property improvements over the years.

In order to stabilise the creek banks, the McCallum’s have fenced out areas along the Tarcutta Creek and gullies, and planted trees in these regions. Six dams have also been built to reduce gully wash on the higher country. The photos below give an indication of the dramatic transformations to the property which have resulted from the work which Peter and Janine have undertaken.



This paddock originally suffered from gully erosion, and cattle tracks to the water source (left). The McCallum’s fenced off the creek area and installed troughs, allowing the area to regenerate and dramatically improving erosion (right)

In addition to the improvements to erosion control and bank stability which have resulted from these changes, the McCallum’s have experienced a raft of additional benefits for their property. The fenced off areas have now grassed over, creating what Peter describes as “ideal living hay stacks”, which can be crash grazed in summer. The fenced areas have allowed for better stock movement, letting stock forage more in the hills as the dams provide a ready water source in these parts of the property.

Both the tree corridors and the dams now provide valuable habitat for wildlife, and the McCallum’s have been excited by the tremendous bird life which now exists on their property. In a short bird survey around the largest dam (6 megalitres in size), an incredible 21 bird species were identified, including 3 listed as vulnerable (mainly honeyeaters).

While the McCallum's have made fantastic progress in protecting their property from erosion, Peter notes that the job is still ongoing. Considerable creek bank was lost in the last floods, and the cost of rocks for engineering solutions is currently prohibitive. The McCallum's have recently planted another 160 small trees, grasses and tussocks to help stabilise the damaged creek bank. Blackberry control is also an ongoing area of attention.

For those looking to address erosion problems on their properties, Peter has a few words of advice. In terms of the projects undertaken, the McCallum's were careful to always approach the task through a series of smaller projects of fairly short duration - this served to break a massive job into smaller, more achievable tasks, and also, importantly, it served "to keep the kids interested!" The McCallum's also took advantage of the support staff at Murrumbidgee Landcare and other groups in the region.

Peter says that his involvement in Landcare has allowed him to learn new skills and has helped solve various on-farm problems. The social aspects of the group have also been a highlight, and he has enjoyed being able to assist others. Says Peter: "Landcare has been good for me, environmentally and socially. Naturally we have learnt a lot!"