

PLANNING PAVES THE WAY

Peter, Sandra, Anthony and Rhonda Heffernan

The Heffernan family have been revegetating and working to improve the sustainability of their Wantiool farms for over 40 years. Peter, Sandra, Anthony and Rhonda are continuing the work of father Cletus, who first started planting trees in the 1970's.

Originally part of Wantabadgery Station, the Heffernan properties had little remnant native vegetation, as a result of being cleared by Chinese labour in the 1800's. Saline salt scalds were also appearing on lower ground sites in the 1980's and were the catalyst to the farming family becoming involved in Landcare. Peter says they were founding members of the Wantiool Landcare group when it commenced in the 1990's and through this group they had the opportunity to develop a whole farm plan with assistance of NSW Soil Conservation staff. This plan included map overlays on aerial photos and mapped out new tree plantings and works to combat salinity. It also marked out new fence lines to follow ridge lines and creek lines and incorporated a laneway system for easy stock movement.

"These maps were very valuable and over time with the help of funding from various Landcare projects, we've been able to implement most of the works, including planting tree lines for recharge to combat salinity and provide shelter belts and fencing out salinity scalds," Peter explained. "We planted these saline areas with tolerant species such as punicea and tall wheat grass together with trees. "Over time these salt scalds have repaired, and with stock excluded phalaris has been able to establish where previously it wouldn't grow", he said.

The Heffernan's have learnt many lessons along the way since they started planting trees, including planting local indigenous tree species and using individual tree guards. "We found that best survivors through the drought and the 1996 bushfire were the local tree species. Species from other regions such as some WA red gums and Mallee species grew well initially but failed to make it through the extended drought and also didn't survive the bushfire. Using Individual plastic tree guards are also vital to seedling survival and to prevent damage from hares and rabbits."

With much of the farm plan now implemented Peter and Anthony's focus has now turned to environmental works on an additional adjoining property, which they purchased in 2006. Through the Cross Property Planning (CPP) project they have been able extend their farm plan and implement changes to fence lines, and establish new tree plantings to improve the connectivity across the landscape and provide habitat for native bird species, and other native fauna. "This flexible approach of the CPP project has been great and has allowed us to design our plantings to suit our needs", Peter said.

Peter and Anthony are continuing to implement their whole farm plan and last year planted over 600 trees. Further strategic planting of individual trees to link with paddock trees are also planned.



Right: Anthony and Peter Heffernan, inspect trees planted as part of the CPP project