

APPENDIX 6. WETLAND MANAGEMENT STORIES

DOCKERS PLAINS PASTORAL COMPANY	26
MALCOLM STARRITT - WOMBOOTA PASTORAL.....	40
ALAN WRAGGE - 'YALOKE'	47
RICK & JOANNE HISKINS	53
JON POCKNELL - SPRINGVALE STATION	59
ROBERT WEBB - "DAPPO"	66
JIM & ROBYN REID -"KALLAROO"	74
IAN McCOLL - 'HILLCREST'	79

DISCLAIMER

Recognising that some of the information in this section of the document is provided by third parties, the State of New South Wales, the author and the publisher take no responsibility for the accuracy, currency, reliability and correctness of any information included in the document provided by third parties.

References to specific brands or types of machinery and/or their adaptation do not imply endorsement.

Users are reminded of the need to ensure that information upon which they rely is up-to-date and to check currency of the information and suitability for a particular property or farming system with the appropriate officer of New South Wales Department of Primary Industries or the user's independent adviser.

JIM & ROBYN REID -“KALLAROO”

Where	Arding, 11km south-west of Armidale, NSW
Enterprise	Fat lamb production (hobby farm)
Size	14.6 hectares
Wetland area	2 hectares

What they did

- Progressively implemented a wetland rehabilitation project spanning 25 years
- Successfully negotiated with the neighbour (NSW Rural Lands Protection Board now Livestock Health and Pest Authority LHPA) on an agreed management plan for the wetland which sits on the property boundary
- Carried out a comprehensive fencing and re-vegetation program on the land surrounding the wetland
- Installed a dam within an adjacent Travelling Stock Route to provide an alternative stock watering point rather than using the wetland.

Why they did it

- As a keen bushwalker, Jim had always recognised the need to balance production with conservation. The wetland provided an opportunity to establish a core conservation area on the property
- The importance of the wetland to waterbirds was evident even before any restoration works were carried out. The project sought to both maintain and enhance the wetland as waterbird habitat into the future
- The establishment of the Arding Landcare Group in 1995 provided a forum through which encouragement, advice, and funding assistance flowed in the years that followed.

Cost

- Approximately \$20,000 spread over 25 years, plus substantial ‘in-kind’ labour supplied by Jim, Robyn and Arding Landcare Group members.

Assistance

- Funding assistance came through the Federal Government’s Envirofund scheme and from the Northern Rivers Catchment Management Authority.

Benefits

- The wetland is an attractive part of the property and Jim is sure that bird life has increased.

Monitoring & evaluation

- Photo points have been established that clearly record the improved condition of the wetland and the success of the re-vegetation effort.

Their story

In the late 1800s the land that now comprises the Reid's property was set aside as a 'community watering reserve' which provided public access to a well that had been sunk next to Thomas Lagoon. Many wetlands in the New England Tablelands region of NSW are referred to as 'lagoons'. Also dating from this time, a Travelling Stock Route (TSR) was established that passed by the lagoon which was used as a stock watering point. Thomas Lagoon would originally have been set within a grassy woodland dominated by apple gum (*Eucalypyus bridgesiana*), New England peppermint (*Eucalyptus nova-anglica*) and black sallee (*Eucalyptus stellulata*).

Thomas Lagoon is an example of a wetland type that is given the classification 'Upland Wetland'. These distinctive water bodies are predominately located within the New England Tablelands region and the Monaro Plateau around Cooma at heights ranging from 700m to 1400m (Thomas Lagoon is 1030m above sea level). As is also typical of this type of wetland, Thomas Lagoon has formed within a natural depression and is fed from localised runoff and as such does not form part of a recognised watercourse. Strahle Lagoon is located upslope on the neighbouring property about 500m away and Jim feels that some groundwater seepage may well feed into his lagoon from there *'The lagoon is about 1.5m at its deepest point, but most of it is only about 0.5m in depth. It rarely dries out fully, although it will occasionally do so during severe droughts'* Jim recalls.



Image 33: Thomas Lagoon, view looking to the south. The lagoon is approximately 250m wide (i.e. from left to right in this photo.) with the left side, or eastern half, on the Reid's property, and the right side, or western half, contained within a Stock Reserve. Jim & Robyn, along with the Arding Landcare Group have, over time, negotiated with the NSW Rural Lands Protection Board to have stock access to the lagoon removed. The construction of a dam nearby to provide an alternative stock watering point has helped to achieve this.

Jim and Robyn moved onto 'Kallaroo' in 1979 and from the outset felt there was a need to include environmental restoration as part of the overall vision for the property. While partly motivated by a keen bushwalkers' appreciation of the natural world, the greatest impetus for Jim initially came from the phenomenon of 'dieback'. Like many areas of Australia, the native woodland vegetation of the New England Tablelands was heavily cleared by early settlers. In addition to this initial wave of physical removal, many of the trees that were left have since died off in a process that is generally referred to as 'dieback'.

While not unique to the tablelands, eucalypt dieback has been particularly severe in this area. While the causes can be many and varied, the net result is a landscape bereft of trees. In the Arding area clearing and dieback had done its work and few native trees remained and many landholders, including Jim and Robyn, felt that something had to be done. The Reid's first attempt at re-establishing native trees around the margins of the lagoon took place in 1982 but wasn't a success: *'There was no Landcare back then and very few people to seek advice from. Heavy soils, weed competition and hares took care of the trees'*. But Jim wasn't about to give up!



Image 34: Jim Reid with some of the re-established native vegetation (Thomas Lagoon is in the background). The Reids have been working to protect and enhance their wetland for over 25 years. In partnership with the Arding Landcare Group, the Thomas Lagoon project now forms part of a wider network of planted vegetation aimed at re-establishing the landscape linkages that were lost through clearing and the scourge of eucalypt dieback.

1. Re-vegetation works

The Arding Landcare Group was formed in 1994 and the Reids joined the following year. While the early revegetation efforts had not been very successful, this situation changed rapidly when better advice, funding and a good peer network became available through the Landcare group. What followed was a series of Natural Heritage Trust funded re-vegetation projects in 1997, 1999 and 2003.

In addition to the works in the immediate lagoon environs, Jim and Robyn participated in the Landcare group's regional corridor program in 1995. This involved re-establishing vegetation along the Thomas Lagoon Road reserve in a project aimed at linking the lagoon vegetation to the wider landscape. The group's visionary corridor program is a 'work in progress' with the Thomas Lagoon section acting as an advertisement of what can be achieved.



Image 35: Re-vegetation work being carried out at Thomas Lagoon in 1999.

2. Fencing & off-wetland stock watering

Thomas Lagoon sits on the boundary of the Reid's property, with approximately half of the lagoon located on the neighbouring Crown Land managed by the NSW Rural Lands Protection Board (RLPB). While Jim fenced their section of the lagoon off in 1986, the RLPB were not prepared to do likewise as access to the lagoon was seen as necessary for stock watering when the adjacent TSR was in use. However, negotiations continued as ongoing stock access was limiting the effectiveness of the rehabilitation effort now being implemented under the banner of the Arding Landcare Group.

With the success of the 1997 grant application, the RLPB relented and agreed verbally to the full fencing of the lagoon but the issue of stock watering was not fully resolved until 2006 when a new dam was installed in the nearby TSR with funding from WetlandCare Australia (WCA).

WetlandCare Australia is a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to improving the management of Australia's wetlands. Fortunately for the Reids and the Arding Landcare Group, two events had occurred which led to their involvement.

- During 2005 Upland Wetlands had been listed under the Federal Government's *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) as being a 'nationally threatened ecological community'. This wetland type was also listed as 'endangered' under the corresponding state legislation
- WetlandCare Australia had received funding from the Northern Rivers Catchment Management Authority to assist with the improved management of endangered wetlands.

The involvement of WCA included hosting a field day at Thomas Lagoon, the development of a long-term management plan, some weed control work and the construction of a stock watering dam within the TSR to finally resolve the issue of stock access to the lagoon. The Landcare group are currently seeking a written acknowledgement from the RLPB that, with the dam installed, stock can now be permanently excluded from the lagoon.



Image 36: Thomas Lagoon had traditionally been used as a watering point for stock using the adjacent Travelling Stock Route (TSR), a fact which made fencing off the wetland a contentious issue. When Upland Wetlands, of which Thomas Lagoon is an example, were declared a 'threatened ecological community' under Federal legislation, WetlandCare Australia were provided with funds to assist with their better management. This dam, constructed within the TSR with funds from WetlandCare, means that Thomas Lagoon need not be opened up to stock for watering purposes in the future.

Challenges

The key challenge faced by the Reids and the Arding Landcare Group has been the divided tenure of the lagoon. For a hundred years or more the lagoon was used as a stock watering point and getting the acceptance of the RLPB, and their customers - the TSR users, to cease this practice and manage the lagoon for conservation outcomes took some time.

In the future the group sees that finding the resources for ongoing maintenance will always be an issue. 'Rabbits, foxes and weeds like Hawthorn will always require attention' Jim acknowledges, 'but we've made a difference – there's definitely more bird life in and around the lagoon these days'.

Summary

In many ways the rehabilitation of Thomas Lagoon reflects the wider movement in community attitudes towards environmental management over the last 25 years. From being viewed solely as a resource to be used, the lagoon has come to be recognised as a rare and valuable ecological community in its own right. The degree to which this new thinking has taken hold is reflected in the fact that the lagoon now forms part of an emerging landscape 'corridor' of recently re-established native vegetation in the Arding district.