



FACES OF LANDCARE

Celebrating 30 years of Landcare in Corangamite



Celebrating **30**
YEARS





I WOULD LIKE TO CONGRATULATE AND
THANK ALL LANDCARE VOLUNTEERS FOR
THEIR CONTRIBUTION OVER THE YEARS.
AND I'M CONFIDENT LANDCARE WILL
CONTINUE TO GROW AND DIVERSIFY.

Alice Knight/ CORANGAMITE CMA CHAIRMAN

It is with great pride that I have an opportunity to write the foreword for this publication marking 30 years of Landcare.

Landcare has been a passion for a long time, it's been exciting to see it grow and develop the way it has. People join Landcare to 'do landcare' and we have seen many exciting projects from soil health, salinity work, sustainable agriculture, increased productivity and hundreds of thousands of trees planted, not to mention the enormous amount of work with pest plants and animals.

Landcare has grown and diversified from a fledgling idea initiated under former Victorian Premier Joan Kirner and VFF President Heather Mitchell, to combine volunteer groups with state funding for the benefit of the environment.

Celebrating this significant milestone, achieving 30 years of Landcare, provides an opportunity to reflect on the impressive achievements of all those involved.

As the stories captured in this book indicate Landcare means many different things to many different people, from those just establishing their group to those who have played a major role in Landcare's foundation in locations all across the Corangamite catchment.

But underlying the contrasting motivations for those involved in Landcare is a commitment to sustainable land management for future generations. And the opportunity to get together to learn and share knowledge with like-minded people.

I would like to congratulate and thank all Landcare volunteers for their contribution over the years. And I'm confident Landcare will continue to grow and diversify. ■



FACES OF LANDCARE



▲ **SCOTT BARR** A LISMORE LAND PROTECTION GROUP MEMBER, - OVER THE YEARS THE GROUP HAS HAD THE BENEFIT OF GOOD FACILITATORS AND LEADERSHIP.



◀ **EDDIE DAVIS** A FARMER OF 55 YEARS HAS BEEN INVOLVED IN LANDCARE AS A FOUNDING MEMBER OF THE EAST MOORABOOL LANDCARE GROUP SINCE 1989.



◀ **OTWAY COAST REGENERATIVE FARMERS** (FROM LEFT) JODIE LAWSON, GWYN JONES, LIBBY RICHES (LANDCARE), RODERICK POOLE, ROS DENNEY, HELEN MASTERS.

◀ **ROS DENNEY**, (SECOND FROM RIGHT), "WE'VE EMBRACED A HOLISTIC APPROACH AND WE BELIEVE THIS REFLECTS POSITIVELY IN THE FOOD WE PRODUCE."

MURRAY JOHNS "IN THE MIDST OF THE PROTRACTED DROUGHT IN 2007 I'D LOOKED AT MY OPTIONS, AND ALSO ACKNOWLEDGED THAT WORKING ALONE WAS MENTALLY HARD. AT THE SAME TIME, I HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO RETURN TO STUDY LEADING TO A ROLE AS A LANDCARE FACILITATOR TWO DAYS A WEEK." ▼



FOUNDING MEMBER RECOGNISES COMMUNITY POTENTIAL

Roger Hardley has been involved in Landcare since its inception in 1986.

His long-term commitment began as a founding member of the Apollo Bay Landcare Group, and this involvement expanded as he took on roles establishing the Southern Otway Landcare Network.

He realised very early on that to ensure Landcare's continuity and ability to grow it needed a structure and representative bodies at a local, state and federal levels. And set about advocating for Landcare on the Corangamite Catchment Management Authority Board from 2003-2011, Landcare committees at a regional level and on the Victorian Landcare Council and its national network.

Thirty years on there are 500,000 people involved in 6,000 natural resource management / Landcare groups nationally. And Landcare has a structure with representative bodies at a state and federal level, through the Victorian Landcare Council and the National Landcare Network.

"It's potentially an enormous force, and they have representation to the Minister's door," Mr Hardley said.

His main focus has always been community involvement and community empowerment.

"This was the genius of former Victorian premier Joan Kirner's idea of combining community volunteers with state funding.

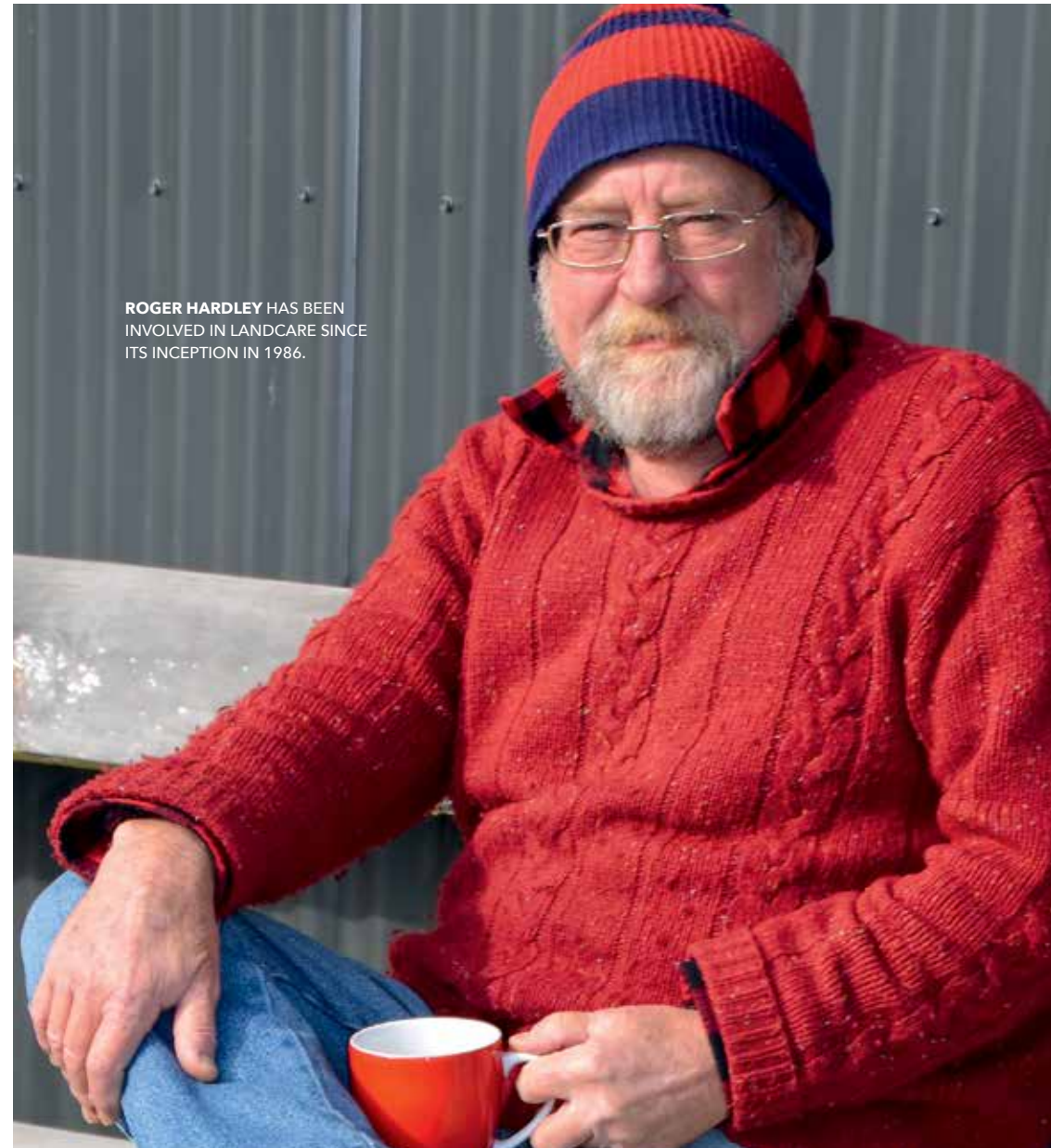
"That ownership within the community contributes to Landcare's success."

He said today's funding distribution changes meant natural resource management organisations and Landcare needed to be even more prepared to cooperate and work together to be more effective.

"Realistically it looks to be the new norm that government look at big ticket items such as the Great Barrier Reef and climate change to fund, this reduces the funding opportunities for community environment groups.

"The national chairs and the peak bodies need to increase their collaborative efforts to achieve greater good. It's a matter of how loud the community is and how much noise it makes on behalf of the environment, combined with using the structure in place through Landcare for advocacy to politicians," he said.

"That sufficient energy to insist politically that environment issues be addressed. And at least now we have the structure to be able to do that. This wasn't always the case before 2009." ■



LANDCARE'S GRASS ROOTS APPROACH MOTIVATES NEW OTWAYS GROUP



"WE BECAME PASSIONATE ABOUT BUILDING A LOCAL FOOD ECONOMY, AND REALISED WE ALL WANTED TO NOT MERELY SUSTAIN OUR LAND MANAGEMENT PRACTICES, BUT TO ENGAGE IN PRACTICES THAT ACTUALLY REGENERATED THE LAND OF WHICH WE ARE CUSTODIANS. SO WE FORMED THE OTWAY COAST REGENERATIVE FARMERS."



Otway Coast Regenerative Farmers/ LANDCARE GROUP

A group of Otways farmers' passion for building a local food economy was the foundation of a new Landcare group along Victoria's beautiful coast.

The Otway Coast Regenerative Farmers (OCRF) group formed after some of the locals took part in a Southern Otway Landcare Network community-based stewardship program.

The course helped participants develop whole-farm plans including finding solutions to management problems, exploring ideas to generate income from niche agricultural and agroforestry streams, to build knowledge and assist in decision making. And an added bonus for group-participant Ros Denney was "connecting with other landowners".

She said when we completed the course we realised that many farmers on different size acreages in this beautiful Otway coast location, with access to abundant water, capable of producing world-class niche food which often "got lost in the system" because of distance to market.

"We became passionate about building a local food economy, and realised we all wanted to not merely sustain our land management practices, but to engage in practices that actually regenerated the land of which we are custodians.

"So we formed the Otway Coast Regenerative Farmers."

She said since the course had finished we'd attracted more like-minded members to learn how to manage their land, their soils, waterways and grazing models, at the same time establishing ourselves as a group to sell high-quality produce.

The group incorporated as a Landcare group as many of the groups' practices are based around natural resource management, and had the support and access to education through their local Landcare facilitator.

Ms Denney said Landcare provided a broader reach than farmers' individual networks, so there was a huge benefit to OCRF being involved with Landcare. It also showed Landcare incorporated other avenues of interest, in addition to its traditional roles of planting trees, and pest plant and animal management.

"We've embraced a holistic approach and we believe this reflects positively in the food we produce."

She said the sense of community, the support and friendships established along the way were all positive outcomes from being involved with Landcare.

"Farming can be an isolated profession, and the exposure to like-minded thinkers has been a very positive outcome. Our group is quite strong and meets regularly. At the moment we're doing a lot of work together to develop group practice standards, and it's taken a lot of work to get to this level.

"Landcare has always been a grass-roots organisation, and we are proud to have established Otway Coast Regenerative Farmers." ■

SEEING THE LANDSCAPE THROUGH DIFFERENT EYES



"WHEN I WALKED THE PROPERTY WITH AN INDIGENOUS ELDER AND A CULTURAL HERITAGE EXPERT THEY CONFIRMED MY SPECULATION.

THE ASSESSMENT FOUND GRINDING STONES NORTH OF THE CREEK, OCHRE ROCK PROBABLY USED FOR PAINTING AND SCATTERINGS NEAR THE CREEK.

I NOW LOOK AT THINGS ON THE PLACE DIFFERENTLY. THE ASSESSMENT CONFIRMED OUR THOUGHTS AND ADDS VALUE FROM A CULTURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL PERSPECTIVE."

Ian Penna/ MOORABOOL CATCHMENT LANDCARE GROUP

Meredith farmer Ian Penna sees the land where he lives a little differently these days.

Ian has been involved in Landcare one way or another for more than 15 years but a cultural heritage assessment has given him a different appreciation of the history of his family's farm.

He was offered an opportunity of a cultural heritage assessment as part of an environment grant and he said the outcome was better than he expected.

He said his family speculated about how the property may have been used historically. We assumed the property was used as a passageway for Aborigines to access the river.

But when he walked his property with an Indigenous elder and a cultural heritage expert they confirmed this speculation.

The assessment found grinding stones north of the creek, ochre rock probably used for painting and scatterings near the creek.

"I now look at things on the place differently. The assessment confirmed our thoughts and adds value from a cultural and environmental perspective," he said.

He moved to the property, purchased by his parents in the 70s, in the 90s, and living there he came to recognise its remnant vegetation values.

Initially planting narrow shelter belts, his family began doing things in a bigger way around 2000 after getting involved in the Moorabool Gorge restoration project. And the property has change dramatically as result. These days there are a lot more trees, it's not as heavily stocked and the weeds are being reduced.

"My brother and I want to improve its environmental value. Balancing the grazing and farming management with maintaining and improving remnant environmental values," he said.

"We plan to put a Trust for Nature covenant over much of the property, so farming and grazing activities can still take place but within environmental constraints."

Ian is part of the Moorabool Catchment Landcare Group and says their facilitator is really keen and active and she's supported by a good executive. And the group membership numbers are healthy because of the access to funding and the initiatives offered.

"Being involved takes me into a community of like-minded people and also provides access funding for projects, equipment and initiatives. Landcare is a great support for protection and restoration work." ■



"WOMEN CAN CONTRIBUTE TO THE LAND EXPONENTIALLY; YOU JUST NEED TO FIND YOUR NICHE. LANDCARE FITS WITH MY PHILOSOPHY AND PROVIDES ME WITH A WAY TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE FARM, AND WE'RE DEFINITELY SEEING THE CUMULATIVE BENEFITS."

Louisa-Jane Cunningham/ LEIGH CATCHMENT GROUP

BROADENING OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH LANDCARE

Shelford farmer Louisa-Jane Cunningham responded to a whole farm planning advert that's provided her with some unexpected opportunities.

After moving to their 797-hectare sheep and cropping farm at Shelford in 2008, she and her husband took up the recommendation from the farm planning workshop to join Landcare.

The couple are now members of the Leigh Catchment Group and Louisa-Jane credits joining Landcare with providing unexpected opportunities and helping to develop an invaluable network of support, knowledge and friendship.

Louisa-Jane grew up in suburbia and said being involved in Landcare had helped her adjust to farming life, to get to know the farming community and make connections. Being new to the area it also made it easier to establish networks and tap into funding for projects.

Through Landcare, opportunities have come up to help the couple complete the actions identified on their whole farm plan, be proactive and led to improvements on other areas of the farm.

"The reality is that incentives and subsidies from Landcare helped get our projects done and the outside input has been really helpful," said Louisa-Jane.

One of their first projects with Landcare support was a grant to remove gorse.

"Through joining Landcare we now receive information about other opportunities. It's enabled me to have a knowledge base and a network of expertise that I can tap into when needed."

More recently Louisa-Jane has joined the Corangamite Rural Women's Network (CRWN), an initiative funded through the National Landcare Programme.

She said CRWN demonstrated Landcare was for everyone and she wants to build on her involvement in that group further.

"Women can contribute to the land exponentially; you just need to find your niche. Landcare fits with my philosophy and provides me with a way to contribute to the farm, and we're definitely seeing the cumulative benefits," she said.

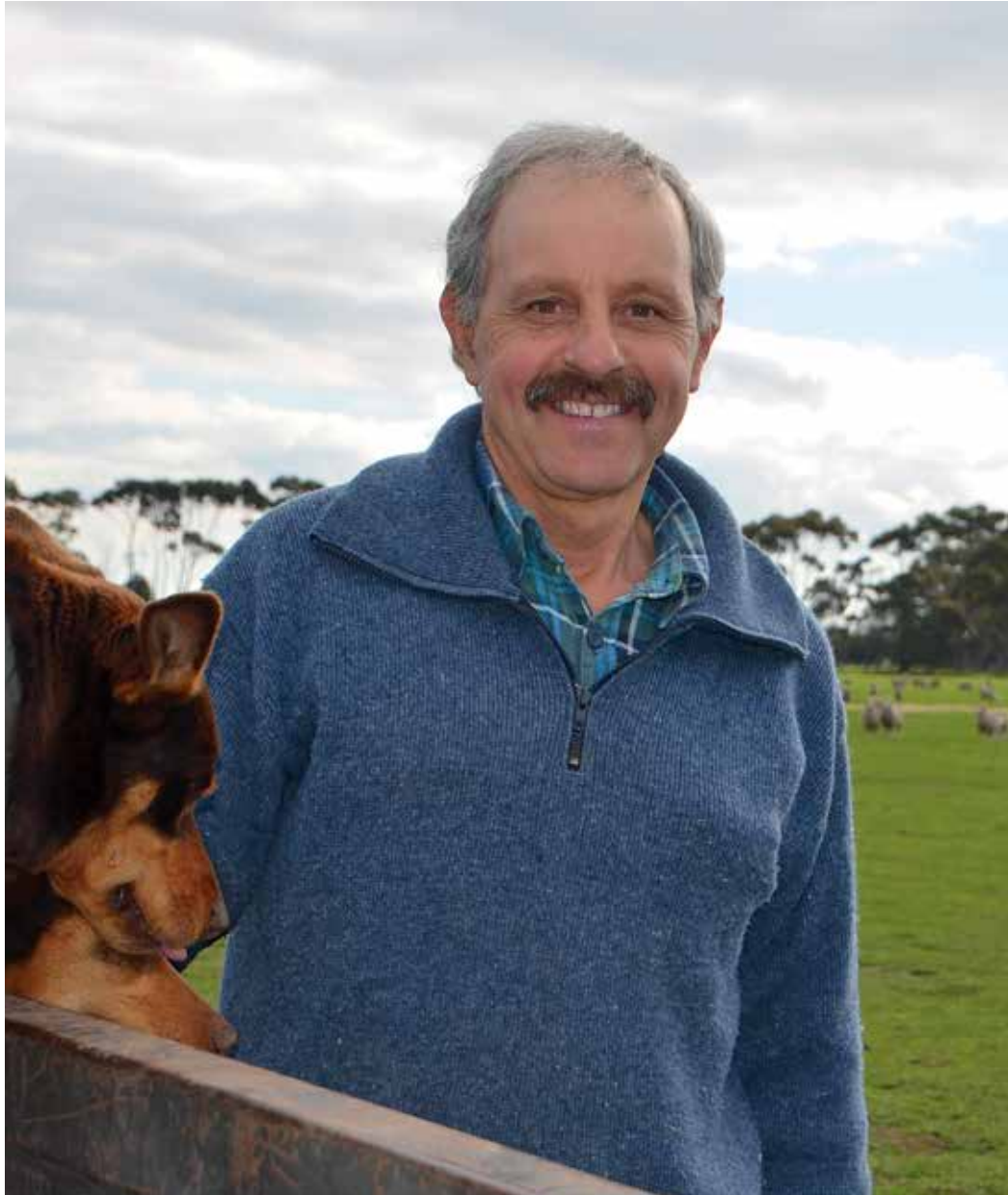
"My involvement with Landcare has been really positive. It's provided linkages, support and friendships. The whole process has been beneficial."

Landcare has given Louisa-Jane a platform to find out things she needed to know. "I still have so much to learn, but Landcare has equipped me with a way of utilising my skill set on farm. It's helped me bridge the gap between suburbia and Shelford, and now when I have a question, I know who to ask!" ■

FACES OF LANDCARE



▲ **EVAN LEWIS** "LANDCARE HAS A ROLE IN PROVIDING SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS FOR FARMERS WORKING IN AN ISOLATED ENVIRONMENT."



◀ **BILL CHARLES** "CHANGING CONDITIONS MEANS WE HAVE TO CHANGE AND LEARN MORE FROM FARMERS USED TO WORKING IN DRIER CONDITIONS THAN WE ARE USED TO, FOR EXAMPLE WIMMERA FARMERS."



◀ **ROGER HARDLEY** "MY MAIN FOCUS HAS ALWAYS BEEN COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT AND COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT."



▲ **JAN HEALEY** BARONGAROOK LANDCARE GROUP'S LONG-SERVING TREASURER JAN HEALEY IS HAPPY FILLING AN ADMINISTRATION ROLE, SHE SAYS "THAT'S HER SKILL."

"LANDCARE IS A WAY FOR ME TO CONNECT WITH THE NEXT GENERATION IN ORDER TO ENSURE THE STEWARDSHIP ROLE CONTINUES."



Evan Lewis/ WOODY YALOOK CATCHMENT GROUP

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

The Woody Yaloak Catchment Group's current chairman Evan Lewis has witnessed the evolution of Landcare during his 20-year involvement.

Throughout the years the group's numbers have remained strong as members continue to motivate each other, recognising the benefits of working collectively to tackle the ongoing farming challenges of pest plant and animal management and improving soil health.

At the same time developing strategic plans for the future and investigating innovative sustainable farming practices to improve productivity.

The group is also reaping the benefit of accumulating 20 years of soil health data.

Mr Lewis said initially when the group was established its role was looking at ways to improve productivity, and there were financial incentives provided to improve perennial pasture. But today the emphasis had changed and its more about improving soil health.

"Now we're looking at other challenges and changing thought processes and practices relating to farming including, planting vegetation buffers along waterways and recognising the multiple benefits of doing this work.

"And the 20 years of soil data we've collated has been invaluable in changing farming practices and being able to identify the optimum soil health requirements for productivity.

"We can now do variable rates of lime spreading and we're able to be more prudent to achieve the best possible outcomes, and from a financial perspective it's been invaluable."

He identified other benefits that come from being part of the group, including improving the likelihood of gaining project funding when applying as a group rather than as an individual. He said that you had greater ability to lobby and were more likely to be successful.

Mr Lewis said Landcare was a way for him to connect to the next generation.

"It was important to make the connection with the next generation in order to ensure the stewardship role continues."

He also said Landcare had a role in providing social connectedness for farmers working in an isolated environment through events such as workshops, crop walk or a social event, "these provide opportunities to get together with like-minded people". ■

A ROLE FOR EVERYONE

Barongarook Landcare Group's long-serving treasurer Jan Healey is happy filling an administration role, she says that's her skill.

And it's based on her continuing interest in seeing the landscape preserved.

And recently there's been an increasing demand for her skills with the group becoming part of a broader network with the support of a new Landcare network facilitator.

Ms Healey said having a facilitator had given a whole new impetus to Landcare in the area and we're now looking to the future.

The group had been in a "holding pattern for a while" according to Jan, with a reduction in membership and a changing demographic affecting the group's on-ground work capability.

Established in 1996 the Barongarook Landcare Group had a strong membership with a committed group of landholders, volunteers and natural resource management experts tapping into state and federal funding for on-ground projects.

The changing landscape, a reduction in landholders, a remnant committee, and the expertise no longer available to help write grant submissions, changed the group's demographic and capability. But they continued doing smaller projects.

But even though the Landcare group was only ticking along Jan brought in other work roles to continue her commitment to the environment. She worked at the Otway Community College and was involved in its certificate of conservation land management. And along with other Landcare members they worked with students on projects like the Joseph Paatsch Reserve along the Barongarook Creek. This project also involved the local Rotary club and employment work crews.

This is Jan's skill, bringing together the different project partners. It's what she likes doing. The partnerships enabled the group to sustain itself in quieter times, working with students on projects on public land.

"It worked really well with the community college focus on training we were able to bring together non-traditional players in the natural resource management space," she said. In 2012 the group were successful in gaining funding for a Landcare facilitator and this has reinvigorated the group. And with the development of the new Central Otways Network which includes Barongarook, Kewar, Carlisle and the Stony Rises the role has expanded.

"It's brilliant. It's absolutely brilliant to expand to a network.

She said there were roles for everybody in Landcare from on-ground to helping out with the paperwork. My skill was in doing the administration, budgets and grant applications. And her role was multi-faceted, linking funding, volunteers, partners, landholders, directing traffic and bringing together all the levels of government funding and community together on the natural resource management projects.

"I get pleasure in seeing it all come together." ■



"MY SKILL WAS IN DOING THE ADMINISTRATION, BUDGETS AND GRANT APPLICATIONS."

Jan Healey/ BARONGAROOK LANDCARE GROUP

COASTAL WORK HAS ITS REWARDS



"LOOKING BACK OVER WHAT'S BEEN ACHIEVED IS A SOURCE OF PRIDE FOR THE GROUP."

Ian and Roma Edwards/ JAN JUC COAST ACTION GROUP

Protecting a rare native orchid, working with passionate volunteers and creating habitat for the endangered Rufous Bristle-bird are among the rewards for a group working to protect Victoria's coast for almost 25 years.

Established formally in 1994 as the first of the Victorian Government coast action groups, Jan Juc Coast Action formed part of the federal Coastcare program, then eventually Landcare. As the Jan Juc Coast Action the group was able to access project funding such as Landcare grants.

Founding member Ian Edwards said practical benefits flow from networking and talking about common problems and solutions. And there were morale benefits from finding other groups facing similar problems and finding solutions.

He said the group started off doing a lot of woody weed removal. Then looking at ways to control the movement of people as we inherited a maze of tracks that had resulted in a loss of vegetation and erosion.

"Controlling people traffic was a major task and some of that work is now part of the Surf Coast Walk track. This involved a great deal of replanting with indigenous vegetation where the coastal vegetation had been destroyed. Graeme Stockton, group vice-president and horticulturalist, provided invaluable advice and knowledge. He also propagates plants of local provenance.

"That work continues creating habitat and encouraging biodiversity. We work from Spring Creek, near the surf club, to near Bell's Beach, about a five-kilometre stretch of coastline," he said.

Looking back over what's been achieved is a source of pride for the group, above all the re-establishment of indigenous coastal vegetation closely allied to that present before settlement. And I like to think that the success of the Rufous Bristle-bird is a consequence of this habitat creation.

"Also the unexpected discovery of *Diuris palustris*, the Swamp Orchid listed under Victoria's *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act*, led to some hand pollination and seed collection for propagation at the Royal Botanic Gardens, and the storage of some seed in the National Seed Bank."

Ian commented on the fragility of volunteer groups and said they had been most fortunate to enjoy the support, the time and the effort of so many locals over so many years.

"Of special value has been the yearly contribution by Rip Curl. For about the past 12 years their staff have contributed a half day of labour toward coastline environmental projects for local environmental groups. It is brilliant." ■



"THE BENEFITS OF BEING PART OF LANDCARE WAS LEARNING FROM OTHERS AND WHAT THEY'RE DOING AND SHARING KNOWLEDGE. AND DISCOVERING THINGS THAT SOMETIMES SURPRISE YOU."



Eddie Davis/ MOORABOOL CATCHMENT LANDCARE GROUP

DIVERSITY ATTRACTS A CROWD

Whether it's discovering whacky facts about bats, attracting birdlife or working in partnership with the local council the Moorabool Catchment Landcare Group provides enough diversity to attract a crowd.

Mount Egerton farmer, and group founding member Eddie Davis, attributes the group's healthy numbers of 115 properties to its leadership team.

Mr Davis a farmer of 55 years has been involved in Landcare as a founding member of the East Moorabool Landcare Group since 1989 with 25 members.

Today the group has expanded and changed its name to Moorabool Catchment Landcare Group in 2012.

The group has been successful in applying for grants for a broad range of projects, and works in partnership with the local council to increase the impact of on-ground work. The Moorabool Shire Council have been partners with the group controlling blackberries and gorse spraying along the roadsides.

The group works closely with local primary schoolchildren in conservation management, which also encourages parent participation in activities such as tree planting.

And also offers courses in bee keeping, chemical use, rabbit control, soil workshops and many others.

He said the benefits of being part of Landcare was learning from others and what they're doing and sharing knowledge. And discovering things that sometimes surprise you.

Mr Davis was referring to a bat monitoring program which identified the many species of bat present in the area. And discovering bats consume their body weight in insects each night, so bats potentially have a financial benefit controlling predators rather than using chemical sprays.

The monitoring program, funded through the R E Ross Trust, involved people at the Ballan men's shed building nesting boxes for group members to place on their properties to help ensure the bats survival.

And the group's nectar project commenced last year, involved planting trees and shrubs to encourage birdlife in and around urban areas is now being introduced in other municipalities. ■

FACES OF LANDCARE



▲ **INDIGENOUS ELDER BRYON POWELL** CONDUCTING A CULTURAL HERITAGE ASSESSMENT AT **IAN PENNA'S** MEREDITH FARM.



◀ **GWYN JONES - OTWAY COAST** **REGENERATIVE FARMERS** A GROUP OF OTWAYS FARMERS' PASSION FOR BUILDING A LOCAL FOOD ECONOMY WAS THE FOUNDATION OF THE OCRF GROUP.



◀ **ALAN KERR** NOMINATED THE GROUP'S INDIGENOUS PLANT NURSERY AND ITS COMMUNITY EDUCATION PROGRAMS AS SOME OF ITS LOCAL SUCCESSSES.

LOUISA-JANE CUNNINGHAM AFTER MOVING TO THEIR 797-HECTARE SHEEP AND CROPPING FARM AT SHELFORD IN 2008, SHE AND HER HUSBAND GUS TOOK UP THE RECOMMENDATION FROM THE FARM PLANNING WORKSHOP TO JOIN LANDCARE. ▼



CREATING A LASTING IMPRESSION



THE BARR FAMILY HAS BEEN FARMING IN THE LISMORE DISTRICT FOR MORE 100 YEARS.

Scott Barr / LISMORE LAND PROTECTION GROUP

Barr family's hard work to reinvigorate the area along the waterways on their family farm at Lismore has left a lasting impression.

The Barr family has been farming in the Lismore district for more 100 years.

Scott Barr remembers as a child working with his parents planting trees along the creek edges, to stop the impact of heavy downpours gouging ever-deepening furrows in the landscape.

The tree planting continues to this day on the 2,000-hectare sheep and cropping farm that is home to multiple generations including Scott's dad Ross and brother Dale and their families.

Scott's mum Jenny, has documented the work planting shelterbelts and plantations, which began more than 30 years ago at the recommendation of state environment department and continued after joining the Lismore Land Protection Group. The kilometres of planting along the waterways on the farm is nearly complete, with only a couple of sections to go.

Jenny summed up her take on Landcare, "to see the change in the landscape is amazing - how it was, and how it is now - makes you proud to be part of Landcare".

Initially the trees were to stabilize the creek banks and create buffers. But there's been additional benefits and Scott says there has been a massive improvement to the property as result of the work.

"Shelter belts have created better lambing paddocks and general shelter for stock.

"We've been putting in a plantation every year. They're about 10-12 metres wide and the property benefit outweigh any other consideration."

He said they were also seeing more diverse fauna on the property as a result of more plantations including a substantial increase in the variety of birds.

The Barrs are active members of the Lismore Land Protection Group which Scott said had healthy numbers. Over the years the group has had the benefit of good facilitators and leadership from the group's coordinators. Brian Wilson was a hard working president for many years and provided access to new and innovative sustainable farm management ideas.

"They make things happen, offering encouragement, and then people get the satisfaction of seeing the results of their hard work. And when you look across the region there is a noticeable change in the landscape as a result of that work. At one point there were more 100,000 trees going in annually."

Through Landcare you're also able share knowledge through farm trips to see how different farming enterprises operate. He said you get to talk to like-minded people. Scott's parents have enjoyed Landcare trips to Gippsland, King Island, Tasmania and South Australia seeing different farming practices and meeting people enthusiastic to share what they know.

The Barr family are grateful for the support provided by the Lismore Land Protection Group and look forward to continuing to leave a lasting impression into the future. ■



"INCREASINGLY PEOPLE WERE RECOGNISING THE VALUE OF LANDCARE. ATTITUDES ARE GRADUALLY CHANGING AND PEOPLE SEE THE IMPORTANCE OF THE WORKS AND THE BENEFITS OF IT."



Alan Kerr/ CURDIES VALLEY LANDCARE GROUP

GROUP HAS THE RUNS ON THE BOARD

Timboon's Alan Kerr, a retired strawberry famer in the predominantly dairying region of south-west Victoria, thinks the local Landcare group has got runs on the board.

And he nominated the group's indigenous plant nursery and its community education programs as some of its local successes.

He says the core group tick away at projects, with the wider community jumping in to support them when needed, as well having the additional benefit of receiving corporate sponsorship.

Alan is a member, and in the past sometimes treasurer, of the Curdies Valley Landcare Group which grew out of the ragwort control group established 30 years ago in the mid-80s.

Initially the group focused on controlling weeds and he said farmers had to be a member of a Landcare group to access the incentives available.

The group identified revegetation and regeneration as its focus next and Alan said this fitted with his land-management approach.

On his own property he has returned 10-15 per cent to native vegetation in areas difficult to farm solving a problem as well stabilising the soil and enhancing the property at the same time.

He said increasingly people were recognising the value of Landcare, "attitudes are gradually changing and people see the importance of the works and the benefits of it".

"The knowledge sharing component helps in farm management in particular soil health," he said.

The Curdies Valley Landcare Group established a nursery propagating indigenous species that's been operating successfully for 15 years and generating seeds for local groups to use on projects.

"It's been a great success.

"Some of the plantations grown from seed have done really well growing one and half metres in the first 12 months. It's a great delight when you see the results of the work done, you feel like you've achieved something," he said.

The group also run events teaching the wider community about the environment. This has included hosting bat workshops that have attracted more than 50 children and their parents.

"That was very successful."

He said the community provide strong support for our events and when things need to be done. ■

LANDCARE OFFERS OPPORTUNITY AND DISCOVERY



"IN THIS ROLE I'VE MET SOME OF THE SMARTEST FARMERS AND SEE WHAT THEY DO AND ASK THEM QUESTIONS. ITS OPENED MY EYES TO A LOT OF OPPORTUNITIES."

Murray Johns/ SURF COAST AND INLAND PLAINS NETWORK FACILITATOR

Bellbrae farmer Murray Johns' role as the Surf Coast and Inland Plains Network (SCIPN) Landcare facilitator was not a career the farmer had envisaged.

As the part time network facilitator for the past two and half years he now combines this role with running a 310-hectare property that has been in his family since the 1960s.

Mr Johns said he'd never considered a career in Landcare, but the opportunity to return to study agricultural science on a scholarship at Melbourne University during the height of a drought, was the start of his role with the community-based environment group.

Fifteen years ago he took over running the family farm, and around the same time he became increasingly involved in Landcare as a volunteer as his parents had done. He also completed a whole farm planning course, gaining a greater appreciation of the benefits of protecting the landscape. He'd set himself a five to ten-year plan for his farm, but the challenges of the millennium drought made achieving that plan difficult.

In the midst of the protracted drought in 2007 he'd looked at his options, and also acknowledged that working alone was mentally hard. At the same time, he had an opportunity to return to study leading to a role as a Landcare facilitator two days a week.

He said he realised that studying and working off the farm was good for him mentally. And I hadn't previously considered Landcare as a career, I'd discovered it's a lot broader than I'd thought.

"Landcare has developed dramatically in the last ten years. It's more diverse than in its earlier years. As well as the traditional role of planting trees and controlling weeds and rabbits. It now involves knowledge sharing on sustainable and innovative farming practices and community building," he said.

"Of recent years it's got a lot broader and involved in getting people together for a purpose, for example workshops and field days but it's also social which is also important element of bringing community together."

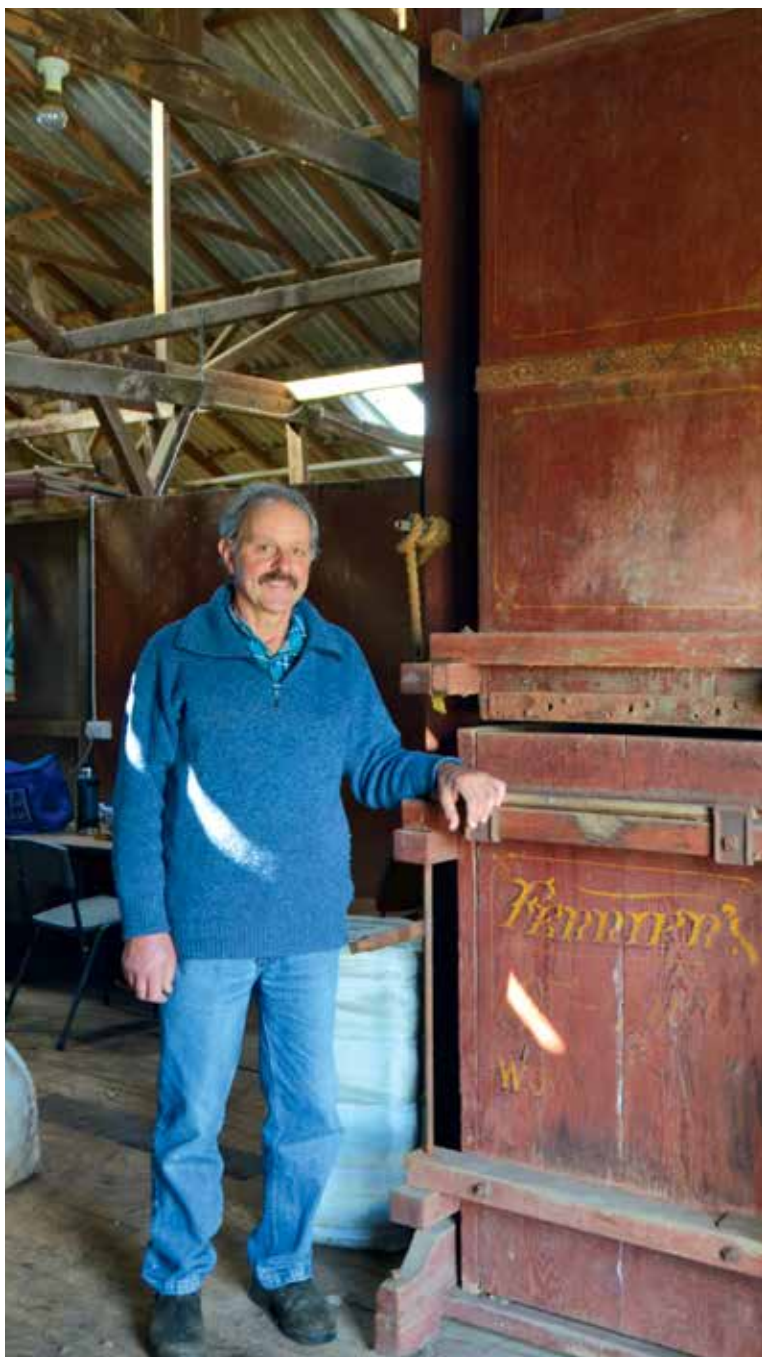
He said being a member of Landcare gave people the opportunity to tap into a range of knowledge and skills.

"I've met people, not just locally, but across the catchment and learnt about innovative and new approaches to farming. With the traditional approach to farming it's very easy to do what's always been done, and miss opportunities that are more sustainable and efficient.

"In this role I've met some of the smartest farmers and see what they do and ask them questions. Its opened my eyes to a lot of opportunities."

He said one of the fundamental benefits of being involved in Landcare was sharing knowledge with people with similar aspirations in farming productivity and sustainability, that wanted to improve their farm and their communities. ■

"THE GROUP'S FOCUS HAD CHANGED OVER TIME IT WAS LESS ABOUT PLANTING TREES THESE DAYS, AND MORE ABOUT LEARNING AND HEARING FROM EXPERTS. THE GROUP'S EMPHASIS WAS ON IMPROVING KNOWLEDGE AND THE MORE PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF LAND MANAGEMENT. WE'VE HAD GUEST SPEAKERS COME AND TALK ABOUT FRACKING, AND PRESENTATIONS FROM EXPERTS ON USING CROP STUBBLE AS A BIOFUEL."



Bill Charles/ CUNDARE-DUVERNEY LANDCARE GROUP

ALL PART OF FARMING

Foxhew sheep and cropping farmer of 50 years, Bill Charles, identified the changing climate as the current focus of the Landcare group where he's been a member for more than 20 years.

And 18 of those 20 years have been as the Cundare-Duverney Landcare Group's treasurer and secretary, and he says Landcare is part of his love of trees and farming.

He said the group's focus had changed over time it was less about planting trees these days, and more about learning and hearing from experts. The group's emphasis was on improving knowledge and the more practical aspects of land management. We've had guest speakers come and talk about fracking, and presentations from experts on using crop stubble as a biofuel.

The Cundare-Duverney Landcare Group has 30 members, with most of the people in the region involved. He said there was a core group of regulars at meetings and there continued to be a "fair bit of interest".

"The Landcare group started in response to encouragement to form groups to access funding for larger projects rather than individual projects. We worked closely with what was then the environment department.

"The group has done a lot of planting and when the tree planting projects are on we get a lot of people involved and we work closely with Lismore Land Protection Group.

"Back when we started we were doing more plantings for shelter belts for grazing. Now we have dryer seasons and changing land management practices such as less burning for stubble management, so now we're looking at learning different farm management practices in a changing/drier environment."

He said water was less reliable, we're getting less runoff and we want to increase our understanding of groundwater and increase knowledge of bore water. We're looking at working with Federation University to get funding for a PhD student to research this, to help farmers understand more about this.

"Changing conditions means we have to change and learn more from farmers used to working in drier conditions than we are used to, for example Wimmera farmers."

Mr Charles said the benefit of being involved in Landcare was working with like-minded people. And the big difference he's noticed over the time is the change in landscape, as a result of tree planting projects. He said whereas before there were isolated gum trees dotted in paddocks, now seeing the trees the group planted grow up gave him great satisfaction.

And a highlight of his years involved with the group was being recognised as a Landcare awards finalist and attending a presentation at Melbourne's Government House. ■

FACES OF LANDCARE



