



Sensis Landcare Catchment Award

Woody Yaloak Catchment Group

The Woody Yaloak catchment is home to around 220 farm families and 1000 small block owners. The catchment covers some 115,000-hectares which starts at the headwaters of the Woody Yaloak River and flows south through Cressy. The river outflows into Lake Corangamite – a RAMSAR lake of international significance. The catchment is affected by poor water quality, salinity, erosion, rabbits, weeds and biodiversity decline.

The catchment group started ten years ago and is now finalising its third five-year-plan. The group embraces the idea of continuous improvement and sees the process of planning and reporting as an important way of re-invigorating their actions.

The group's major achievements to date include the creation of neighbourhood groups, the development of a geographic information system (GIS) and the involvement of schools, local government and sponsors. Over the past decade more than four million dollars have been invested in the project, with 65% coming from landholders.

The establishment of neighbourhood groups has encouraged a multi-issue, across-farm-boundaries approach to planning in the catchment. Groups of between two and ten neighbours work together with a facilitator on five-year projects that link in to property priorities. The process has been very successful. In a 1990 survey only 15% of landholders in the area thought neighbours were important in deciding what Landcare works to undertake. By 2000 90% of landholders believed they *could* work with their neighbours to develop subcatchment Landcare plans.

The work of the neighbourhood groups is supported by a simple, low-cost, GIS that records future plans as well as historical records. The system allows for each local plan to be amalgamated and create a broader catchment picture. This technology has now grown into a not-for-profit business that provides its services to other Landcare groups across the State.

The group's third five-year-plan aims to deliver a range of priority outcomes in the catchment including pest plant and animal control, land class fencing on highly erodible land, treatment of active erosion areas, fencing and regeneration of riparian vegetation, revegetation of saline discharge sites and doubling the area of vegetation on private land.

The Woody Yaloak Catchment Group has made an outstanding contribution to catchment management. It is a group that encourages planning and evaluation but is always open to innovation and new approaches.



Pictured L-R: Michael Rowe, Councillor Kevin Knight and Alice Knight from the Woody Yaloak Catchment Group, winners of the Sensis Landcare Catchment Award with Fiona Baxter, Environment Manager Sensis (second from left), John Thwaites, Minister for Environment and John Landy, Governor of Victoria.