

Kicking Off to a Good Start

Murrumbidgee Landcare Inc

Setting up a new group is an exciting milestone for a Landcare Coordinator. By taking a well-planned approach and using some good facilitation tools such as World Cafe, a new group was enthusiastically formed.

The issue

The Muttama Creek Catchment lies between Cootamundra and Gundagai featuring highly fertile alluvial planes along a narrowed river system contrasted by steep, brittle hills mostly cleared of vegetation. The catchment area comprises threatened Box Gum Grassy Woodlands that have been degraded over the years due to agricultural production. The Muttama Creek corridor is a major linkage corridor through the catchment which comprises of scattered remnant River Red Gum. The corridor and with it the catchment is degrading with over grazing being a major factor of tree loss and stream bank erosion. Past attempts to interest landholders in improved natural resource management at a grass roots level by Local Land Services and Catchment Management Authorities had been met with minimal uptake and project funds were not easy to expend. When a family landholder group asked for Landcare advice to address a number of on-farm environmental concerns, it became evident that the challenges they faced were shared by neighbours along much of the catchment and it was decided to invite the broader community to have a conversation about the main issues of concern.

The solution

The Local Landcare Coordinator worked with locals to host a family friendly meeting with evening BBQ. The structure of the meeting was important to manage differing views on agricultural production and strong personalities. A senior ecologist and researcher delivered an informative presentation about sustainable farming practices and Landcare facilitated a discussion about the farming and environmental concerns of farmers using the World Cafe methodology. Through this tool the organisers were able to harness diverse views and perspectives, allowing everyone to contribute to the discussions in a very friendly and lively way. A list of interest areas were identified and a priority ranking led to setting future actions and the establishment of a new and enthusiastic Landcare group.

The impact

- A new Muttama Creek Landcare Group was formed with a list of key priority areas.
- Everyone had an opportunity to share their views and for these to be considered via the World Cafe tool.
- Neighbours got to speak about NRM topics for the first time, sharing challenges they faced with the persistent drought. New perspectives on Sustainable Farming were gained.
- Members of the group bonded and felt united in the outcome of the meeting.
- A series of immediate initiatives were identified, which have since been undertaken.



Key facts

- Whilst previous attempts to engage landholders in NRM activities had been difficult to achieve, gaining the support of a few local families helps significantly to build momentum.
- Plan a first public meeting well, with flexibility to adapt.
- Facilitation tools such as World Cafe really help to engage participants and allows everyone to move around the room and exchange ideas. This in turn builds trust and community cohesion.



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