



# Murrumbidgee Landcare Inc.

## 2015/16

### Annual Report

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# Contents

<b>PART 1</b>	<b>Page</b>
A message from the Chair .....	4
The Murrumbidgee Catchment .....	5
Our staff and volunteers .....	6
Our projects - overview .....	7
Regional Landcare Facilitators' Report .....	8
Our projects	10
Cross-property planning to balance production and biodiversity conservation on mixed farms in the Central Murrumbidgee .....	10
Facilitated RD&E in weed management — improving strategies for summer weed control	13
Champions of Change — Farmers and their paddock trees .....	15
Our activities	16
The Landcare Irrigation Area Collective .....	16
Slow the flow .....	17
National Tree Day—Humula, Wagga Wagga and Tarcutta .....	18
Picturing the Rangelands plants .....	19
Saving a Pleistocene relic .....	20
Landcare—it's for the birds .....	21
Revegetating a community .....	22
Landcare is buzzing! .....	23
Tarcutta Landcare rejuvenation .....	24
Birds, plants and night animals of Five Ways Reserve, Henty .....	25
Reviving Landcare on the plains .....	26
Caring for a RAMSAR site .....	27
Reinvigorating Landcare groups .....	28
Signposting the song lines .....	29
Barb busters save squirrel gliders .....	30
<b>PART 2</b>	
Financial Report .....	31



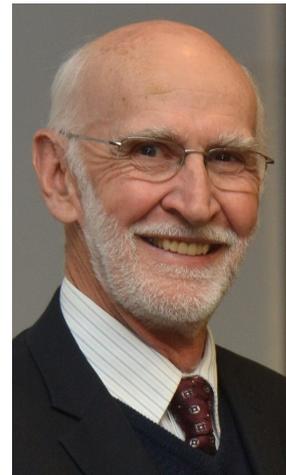
Tree planting at the Henty Munnyabla Reserve

# A Message from the Chair

## History

Following the first Landcare conference in Hobart in 1993, media commentators and Landcare members noted (loudly) that those speaking and reporting for Landcare were politicians and bureaucrats rather than Landcare members. There was no voice or representation by or for Landcarers.

The Murrumbidgee Landcare Association (now MLI) was created with support from the Murrumbidgee Catchment Management Committee (which morphed into the Catchment Management Authority and now Local Land Services) as a non-profit representative group completely independent of any government or quasi-government organisation or other community group. Strong financial support followed (including National Heritage Trust funding) but this support dwindled through the CMA and MLI now receives no direct financial support from any government department or agency.



## Current situation

MLi has survived financially by seeking and managing Landcare type projects with funding now depending almost entirely on the management of these projects. This may not be sustainable in the long term.

Projects obtained have been efficiently managed, have engaged a large number of land managers and have had an impressive beneficial effect on extensive parts of the landscape and its land managers. These projects represent a cash and skill contribution to the Murrumbidgee Valley and Riverina which would not have otherwise been available. Full details of the two largest physical projects are set out in this annual report. They represent an investment on behalf of the public of over \$1.5 million.

The management of these projects has relied on the expertise and enthusiasm of the project officers involved, and has resulted not only in a substantial program of sustainable land management ground works but also an extensive circulation of the knowledge, skills and enthusiasm for the projects to the wider rural community.

In cooperation with Riverina Local Land Services, MLI hosts the Regional Landcare Facilitator project and the Local Landcare Coordinator Initiative, which employ two and three staff respectively. As in other significant projects, these are driven by a management committee providing direction to the MLI's Executive Officer, effectively delivering an increasingly successful and promising project. Details of these projects are set out elsewhere in this report.

## Acting as a representative body

The success of any representative body is always limited by the willingness of other parties to cooperate. At a local or regional level this has sometimes been problematic but has improved dramatically with the advent of Riverina Local Land Services. At a state level, in the early stage of Landcare such representation was via a group largely represented by parties other than Landcarers. That organisation has now been replaced by Landcare NSW, an independent body designed to represent Landcare. MLI has, and will continue to have, one or more representatives on the Landcare NSW Council. This has resulted in a defined way for land managers to be represented at a state level through MLI. The prospective role of Landcare NSW is both crucial and promising.

## Summary

It has been my privilege and pleasure to have chaired MLI for the last three years. The committee has comprised an extraordinary group of talented and dedicated volunteers who have had, and exercised the opportunity to have, a successful long-term effect on sustainable agriculture, land management, and the development of human resources.

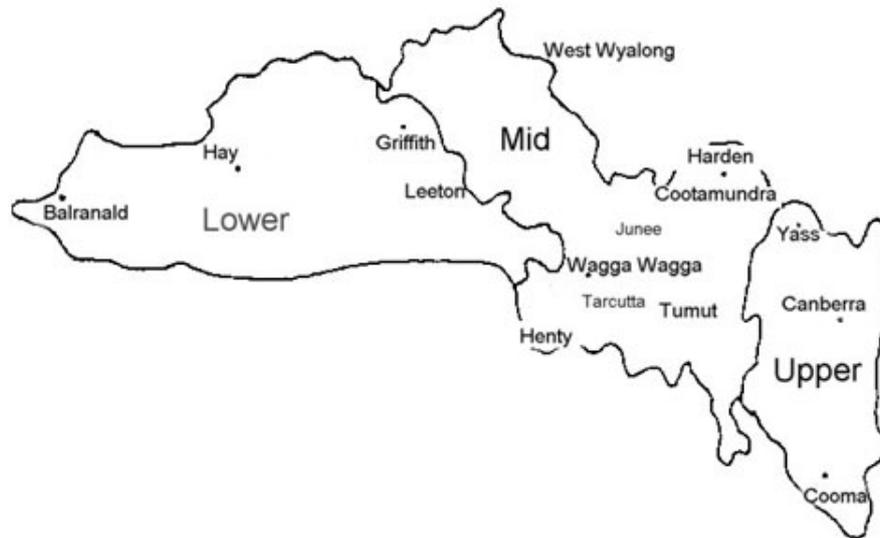


A view of Tom Stacy's property



# The Murrumbidgee Catchment

The Murrumbidgee Catchment occupies an area of 84,000 square kilometres, extending west from Cooma to Balranald and south from Temora to Henty. It is centred around the Murrumbidgee River, which is approximately 1,600 kilometres in length, from its source in the Kosciuszko National Park to its junction with the Murray River near Balranald. The river forms a significant part of the wider Murray-Darling Basin. Its annual flows total around 4.4 million megalitres.



## About Murrumbidgee Landcare Inc.

**Murrumbidgee Landcare is the community voice for natural resource management and sustainable farming systems throughout the Murrumbidgee catchment.**

Murrumbidgee Landcare Inc (MLi) is a grass roots, umbrella organisation representing Landcare in the Murrumbidgee catchment. The membership of MLI is made up of members of groups and networks across the catchment. Currently there are fifteen groups in the MLI network stretching from the ACT region in the east to Hay in the west.

## Murrumbidgee Landcare Inc. Vision

A landscape supporting vibrant, financially sustainable communities, managed in harmony with natural systems to maximise their retention and expansion.

Our key priorities are to:

- support the Landcare networks
- encourage strategic alliances for the implementation of Landcare initiatives
- promote Landcare to the wider community and in particular to encourage young people to engage in Landcare activities.

Our activities are directed to:

- Providing initiatives to improve and strengthen the grassroots Landcare movement.
- Representing Landcare group members, including speaking on their behalf and lobbying government at National, State and Local levels.
- Developing linkages and brokering partnerships with other organisations.
- Promoting and developing a Landcare network.
- Promoting resources available through the state community organisation, Landcare NSW, to facilitate training and skill building for Landcare members.
- Investigating funding sources for community projects.
- Providing a forum for Landcarers to gain information and exchange ideas.



A dedicated Landcarer

# Our staff and volunteers

MLi relies on the hard work and commitment of its staff, and the enduring efforts of a dedicated group of volunteers drawn from its Landcare groups and the local community.

## The MLI Committee 2015-16

### MLi Executive Committee

Mr Tom Stacy	Chair
Mr Matt McGrath	Deputy Chair
Dr Ted Wolfe	Secretary
Ms Svetlana Manns	Treasurer
Mr Matt Pearce	Public Officer
Ms Kimberley Beattie	Communications Officer
Dr Ted Wolfe	Landcare NSW representative
Ms Glenys Patulny	Landcare NSW representative
Ms Karen Jamieson	Executive Officer

Membership of the MLI ordinary committee comprises the Chairs, or nominee, from each of the Landcare groups within the Murrumbidgee Catchment.

## The MLI Staff

### Executive Officer

Ms Karen Jamieson

### Regional Landcare Facilitators

Ms Bindi Vanzella  
Ms Kimberley Beattie  
Mr Dick Green (until December 2015)

### Local Landcare Coordinators

Ms Maddy Gorham - Mid-Murrumbidgee  
Ms Kerri Keely - Irrigation  
Ms Annabel Lugsdin - Rangelands  
Ms Megan Harris - Temora/Bland (LachLandcare Inc.)  
Ms Mikla Lewis, OAM - Young (LachLandcare Inc.)

### Cross-Property Planning Project

Ms Jacinta Christie  
Ms Nicole Maher

### Silverleaf Nightshade Project

Ms Karen Herbert  
Mr Bob Thompson



A nest box installed as part of the Cross-Property Planning project



Wildflowers found while planting trees at the Henty Mynyabla Reserve



National Tree Day

# Our Projects - Overview

## The Regional Landcare Facilitator Project

The Regional Landcare Facilitator (RLF) project is a partnership between the Australian Government, Riverina Local Land Services, Murrumbidgee Landcare Inc. and Lachlandcare Inc. with funding provided by the National Landcare Programme.

The project is designed to support community Landcare, farming systems and grower groups to enhance land manager knowledge and capacity for natural resource management (NRM), deliver ecosystem services and use sustainable agricultural practices. The RLF works across the Riverina NRM region defined by the boundaries of Riverina Local Land Services. This project commenced on 1 July 2015 and will conclude on 30 June 2018.

## The Local Landcare Coordinator Initiative

The NSW Government has provided \$15 million over four years until 30 June 2019 to renew the government-community relationship and unlock the full potential of the thousands of volunteers in the Landcare network. The Local Landcare Coordinator Initiative aims to deliver three inter-related components: The Landcare Future Fund, the Landcare Community of Practice and a network of Local Landcare Coordinators.

The primary purpose of the initiative is to enable the effective participation of voluntary, community-based groups and networks, landholders and the wider community in natural resource management activities that manage and restore the natural environment, improve the sustainability of agricultural production, and build the resilience of communities.

## Cross-property planning to balance production and biodiversity conservation on mixed farms in the Central Murrumbidgee

The Cross Property Planning (CPP) project is a six-year community Landcare project funded through the Australian Government's Biodiversity Fund and the NSW Environmental Trust, and is due for completion in 2017. The project was developed to link and extend the fragmented remnant vegetation across property boundaries to protect and enhance biodiversity and habitat.

The project covers an area of 58,000ha stretching from Bethungra/Illabo in the north to Tarcutta/Humula in the south, and involves 76 neighbouring landholders.

The project recently received the Green Globe Natural Environment Award, an award provided by the NSW Government to recognise leadership in protecting and enhancing natural ecosystems including native flora and fauna, natural habitats, forests, water resources, land systems and soils, and biodiversity.

## Facilitated RD&E in weed management — improving strategies for summer weed control

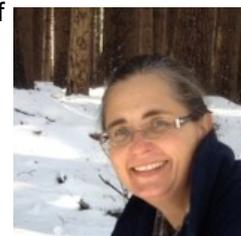
This project - the Silverleaf Nightshade (SLN) Project - commenced in 2013 and is due for completion in 2017. It is funded by Meat & Livestock Australia and Australian Wool Innovation and is designed to encourage farmers to establish participatory trials to compare the economic benefit of different control strategies against current practice for SLN infestations, in different production systems and agro-ecological zones.

The project covers four states - NSW, Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia - and involves approximately 350 landholders.

# Regional Landcare Facilitators' Report

## Bindi Vanzella

In September 2015 I commenced the role of Riverina RLF (in a job share arrangement). Much of my time (3 days per week) has been about direct contact with people. What do they expect from Landcare? What do they want Landcare to look like? Do they even want to be involved in Landcare and, if so, how? I also had to bring with me a “can do” attitude, backed with reliability and accountability to secure trust.



The breadth of my activities has included:

**Building rapport, respect and relationships:** Most focus has been with Riverina Local Land Services encompassing staff across the region from Tumut to Hay. This is the key organisation linked to Landcare support in the Riverina.

**Landcare Group activity:** Contact was made with all existing Landcare groups to various degrees of engagement. Most significantly for the irrigation district, the Landcare Irrigation Area Collective was formed in late 2015 with the local support of Murrumbidgee Irrigation Ltd. and Riverina Local Land Services (Griffith). It marked a change to how Landcare groups may want to operate in the future.

**Reconnecting and building new linkages:** The organisations that have been linked with Landcare in the Riverina in the past, and could be in the future, are many. Part of my role has been to start re-establishing these contacts across NRM and Sustainable Agriculture stakeholder groups.

Importantly, I also broadened stakeholder engagement to capture organisations that are not traditionally identified with Landcare in the area but have a role to play such as Riverina TAFE, CSU School of Arts, Riverina Tourism, Regional Development Australia, Lands NSW and grower/industry groups, e.g. cotton and rice.

**Local Landcare Coordinators:** Employed by LachLandcare and Murrumbidgee Landcare Inc., the 5 positions (across 6 geographic zones) were filled in March 2016. It was a turning point to progress Landcare in the Riverina and support the RLF. My involvement has been based around mentoring and cultivating a team ethos, which included our first ever collaborative meeting with Riverina LLS staff.

**Marketing Landcare:** The overall communication pitch is ‘Landcare in the Riverina is back’. Delivery formats include my weekly e-newsletter to more than 150 people, and social media (Twitter and Facebook) stories in collaboration with other Landcare staff. Our broadest reach is the weekly Landcare update on ABC Riverina Radio (live on air) co-shared with Murray Landcare with an audience of 250,000 people.

**Government relationships:** I have also been providing feedback to the Commonwealth on emerging NRM issues in the region relevant to sustainable agriculture practices and Landcare community needs.



Threatened Species Commissioner's visit

This was best illustrated when I organised for Gregory Andrews (Threatened Species Commissioner) to visit the Riverina for three days' intensive learning and sharing in the Irrigation District and Rangelands. It was an overwhelming success, demonstrating collaborations and partnerships within the Riverina.

**Formal Landcare engagements:** I attended the NSW Landcare Conference (Orange) and National Regional Landcare Facilitators Conference (Canberra).



Australian Government



Local Land  
Services  
Riverina



# Regional Landcare Facilitators' Report

## Kimberley Beattie

I commenced in the Regional Landcare Facilitator (0.4FTE) role at the beginning of January 2016 following the resignation of Dick Green in December due to ill health.

My main role in this position is communicating the Landcare message to the region – letting the Riverina know that Landcare is open for business. I have focussed heavily on Facebook and Twitter, as a result of which the number of followers on the MLI Twitter account has increased by over 200 people. Our Facebook page has also increased in popularity with the average monthly reach now sitting at approximately 2,500 people.



Kimberley Beattie

I have been involved in the development and delivery of the weekly segment on ABC Regional Radio in collaboration with Murray Landcare, providing comprehensive updates to a listening audience of approximately 250,000 people. The notes from the radio segment are then circulated via an ever-expanding email listing.

I created a Riverina Landcare blog site, [www.riverinalandcare.org.au](http://www.riverinalandcare.org.au), to promote Landcare activities and the achievements of the Riverina Local Landcare Coordinators hosted by both MLI and LachLandcare. This site showcases the workshops, field days and other events that the Landcare Coordinators have organised since they came on board.

I worked with Murray Region Landcare and the Local Landcare Coordinators to develop and deliver the Riverina Landcare display at the Henty Machinery Field Days held in September. Despite the weather, the shed was very well patronised over the three days.



The Riverina/Murray Landcare site at Henty Machinery Field Days

I attended the National Regional Landcare Facilitators' Conference held in Canberra in June, and represented MLI at the National Landcare Conference held in Melbourne in September.

A very important role of the Regional Landcare Facilitators is to support and mentor the Local Landcare Coordinators hosted by both MLI and LachLandcare, and I have worked to assist them wherever possible.



L-R: Kerri Keely, Louise Hufton (Riverina Local Land Services), Maddy Gorham, Annabel Lugsdin, Gemma Hawkins (Local Landcare Coordinator, resigned June 2016) and Cherie White (Riverina Local Land Services)



Megan Harris and Mikla Lewis, OAM

# Our Projects

## Cross-property planning to balance production and biodiversity conservation on mixed farms in the Central Murrumbidgee

The Cross Property Planning (CPP) project is a six-year community Landcare project to protect and enhance native vegetation in the central Murrumbidgee region of NSW. This region has been extensively cleared for agriculture, with the remaining native vegetation (less than 5% of the total area), including the Endangered Ecological Community of Box Gum Grassy Woodlands, now existing in small, scattered patches on multiple tenures.

The CPP project was developed to link and extend the fragmented remnant vegetation across property boundaries to protect and enhance biodiversity and habitat. This project is funded through the Australian Government's Biodiversity Fund and the NSW Environmental Trust, and is due for completion in 2017.

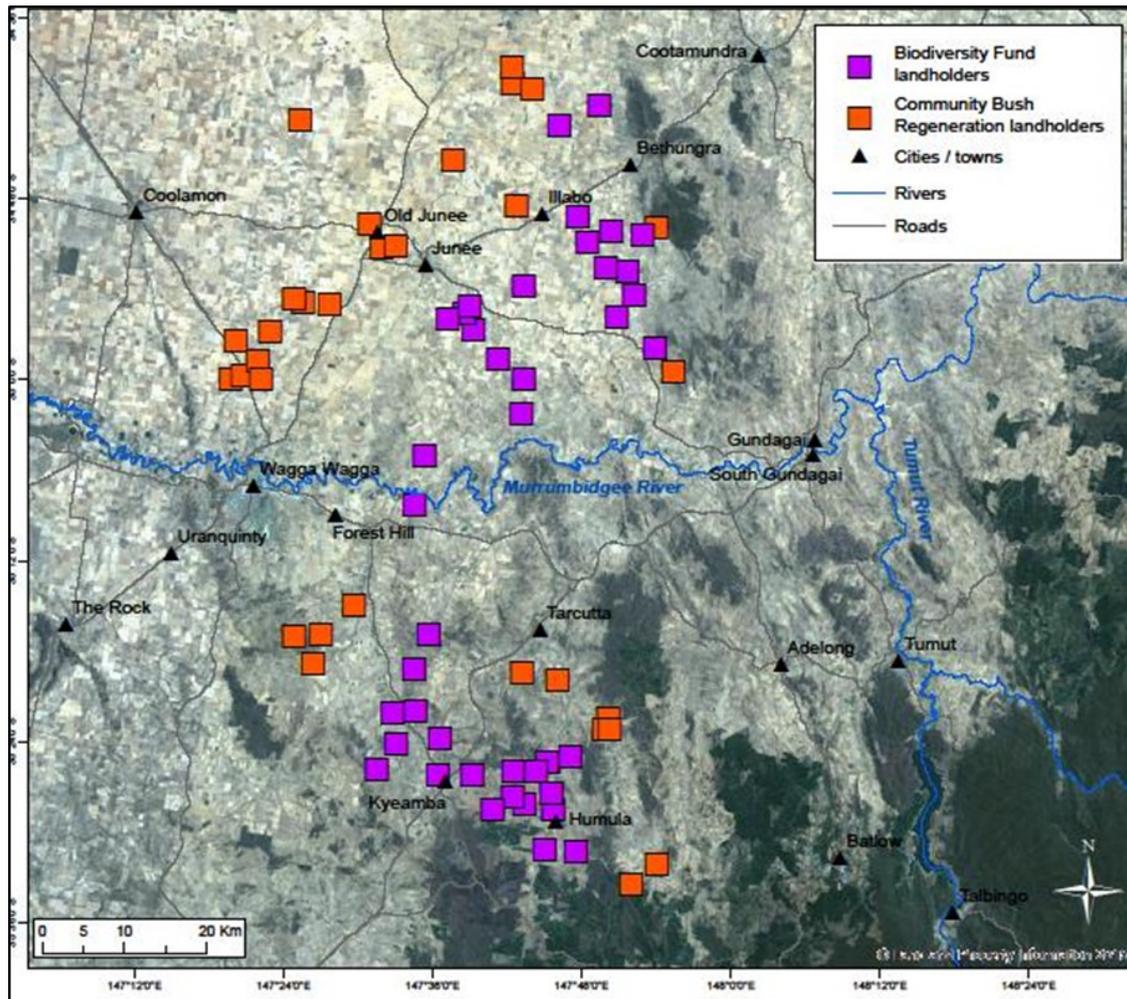


Achievements of the Cross Property Planning project to date

### On-ground works

There are 76 neighbouring landholders engaged in the CPP project, covering an area of over 58,000 ha. Using mapping and an evaluation of the biodiversity attributes of each property, cross-property plans were prepared to elicit the most effective contribution each property could make to habitat connectivity. The plans were used to guide protection, revegetation and management activities on each property, with incentive funding provided to landholders to undertake these works.

## Cross-property planning to balance production and biodiversity conservation on mixed farms in the Central Murrumbidgee



Locations of the properties involved in the CPP project

On-ground works have included:

- Protection of mature paddock trees,
- Planting scattered paddock trees and paddock tree “groves”,
- Protecting remnant vegetation, and enhancing with understorey plantings,
- Planting tree lines and blocks,
- Fencing and revegetating around dams and riparian areas, to manage erosion and water quality,
- Fencing and revegetating damaged parts of the landscape, such as areas of gully erosion and salinity, and
- Landscape-scale pest and weed management.

To date, 693ha has been revegetated and 672ha of remnant vegetation has been protected, while 13,848ha has been managed for weeds, and 28,068ha managed for pests.



A protected biodiverse dam, Illabo



Protected mature paddock trees, Book Book

# Cross-property planning to balance production and biodiversity conservation on mixed farms in the Central Murrumbidgee

## Events

The CPP project has featured regular workshops, field days and many other activities, open to everyone. The project has partnered with 17 organisations, drawing on their skills and expertise to deliver events covering a broad range of relevant topics. Project events have been delivered in response to direct requests or interest from project landholders, but were open to all members of the community to attend, significantly expanding the project's reach.

The social aspects of the activities were also significant in reinvigorating community connections through building and strengthening relationships between landholders in each of the regions. In 2015/16, 16 events were held attracting over 250 people:

- Two "Rodenator" demonstration days,
- Seven "Women on Fire" workshops,
- Three Christmas dinners featuring guest presenters,
- Two "Women on Fire" planning session workshops, and
- Two sub-clover and animal health breakfast barbeques.



Women on Fire workshop, Eurongilly



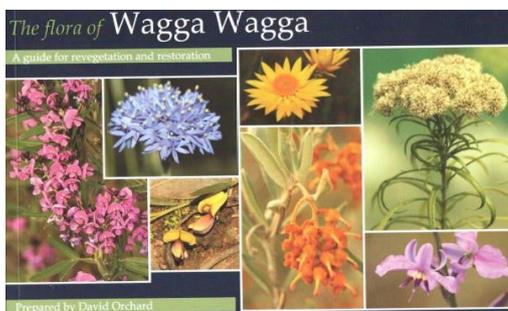
"Rodenator" demonstration day, Book Book

## Resources

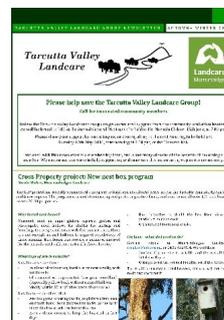
Over 80 resources have been produced to date that share the knowledge and stories from the project. They are all freely available on our website: [www.mli.org.au/projects/cpp](http://www.mli.org.au/projects/cpp).

In 2015-16, 36 new resources were produced:

- Three workshop reports,
- Nine landholder case studies,
- Six Landcare group newsletters, and
- Eighteen information guides on topics covering native vegetation on farms, wildlife on farms, revegetation and preparing for bushfires.



"The flora of Wagga Wagga" book, by David Orchard



Newsletters for the Tarcutta Valley (left) and Junee Area (right) Landcare groups

# Our Projects

## Facilitated RD&E in weed management — improving strategies for summer weed control

This project commenced on 30 October 2013 and is due for completion on 30 May 2017. It has four broad aims, namely:

- ◆ Utilise multiple extension channels to develop a national community of interest, to raise awareness of Silverleaf Nightshade (SLN) best management practice information in an interactive and coordinated manner
- ◆ Encourage farmers to establish participatory trials to compare the economic benefit of different control strategies against current practice for SLN infestations, in different production systems and agro-ecological zones
- ◆ Investigate the social drivers and barriers for SLN control and to reflect on the implications for adoption of SLN best management practices
- ◆ Develop approaches to overcome identified barriers to adoption by improving the regional relevance, effectiveness and the delivery of SLN best management practices (BMP), thereby increasing the levels of capacity, and willingness of farmers to effectively manage this weed.



Silverleaf Nightshade (photo Rex Stanton)

### Project highlights so far

A baseline survey that targeted 500 growers and advisors was completed at the start of the project to detect change in awareness, attitude, knowledge and management practice. The survey determined issues around the information delivery mechanisms; the prioritisation of weed management; the social, economic, environmental and management issues affecting adoption appropriateness; and recommendations for packaging and instruction of weed management (including weed management plans and cost/returns over time). The baseline survey also collected comments on the current BMP for further improvement to better adapt local farming scenarios.

Strong partnerships have been established with fifteen collaborators across four states in conjunction with active interactions between grower groups, through the completion of more than forty grower group meetings, workshops and farm walks. The workshops were primarily to promote the best management practice information to advisors, farmers, contractors, Weeds Officers and NRM personnel, to raise awareness and to attract "qualified" advocate growers to trial the BMP based on their farming scenarios.

Participants were invited to share their stories at the workshops or through the news forum (blog) to cover different regions, soil types, production scenarios and infestation levels. A

comprehensive database was compiled that included affected growers, growers groups, Landcare groups, public and private partners, noxious weeds advisory groups, local councils and spray contractors in each state.

Eighteen 'champion' growers were selected across four states for case studies to share their stories with other farmers at the workshops or through the web site. The purpose of the case studies was to promote the successful management of SLN to other farmers to increase the adoption of the BMP strategies across all geographic areas and productions systems of Australia.

Participatory research was undertaken to generate a large and diverse baseline data on farming scenarios, weed pressure and failure across large geographical zones. Approximately 350 farm scale participatory on-farm validation sites of BMP have been established across four states through active coordination of state and local collaborators.

A project proposal has been submitted to Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA) and Australian Wool Innovation (AWI) to continue this project for another two years.



SLN workshop, Culcairn, NSW demonstrating the Weed Seeker technology (photo Karen Herbert)

# Facilitated RD&E in weed management – improving strategies for summer weed control

## Summary of Events/Workshops:

An interactive community of interest has been established across four states (VIC, NSW, SA & WA), through the completion of 44 workshops, distribution of 1,500 BMP brochures, >30 media articles nationally and information sharing of interested growers and advisors via the SLN website.

On-farm participatory research trials were established in 82 locations nationally utilising six generalised land descriptions (cropping pasture, mixed farming, unproductive farmland, roadside and reserve) and three broad treatment types incorporating either best management practice (BMP), farmer conventional management practice (CMP), or zero control.



Fence line paddock spray trial in Katanning WA – one of 350 SLN trials established in 82 locations nationally comparing the economic benefit of recommended best management strategies against current practice for SLN infestations, in different production systems and agro-ecological zones (photo Claudia Hadlow)

## Milestones Achieved:

The project has five key Milestones, as follows:

1. Improve the regional relevance, effectiveness and adoption of the best management practice (BMP) for Silverleaf Nightshade across five states of southern Australia.
2. At least 200 advisors equipped with the most up-to-date research and management information and the Silverleaf Nightshade BMP being conducted on 30,000ha of infested paddocks.
3. An interactive community of interest established across five states, supported with case studies and information from the network of interested growers and advisors.
4. BMP evaluated by 350 participatory growers through on-farm demonstration trials.
5. Update the BMP recommendations to have wider geographic and contextual application from knowledge generated from network of grower evaluation. If shown to be different between regions, the regional BMP packages will be derived and supported by benefit/cost analysis with comparison of current versus recommended approaches.

The first three milestones have already been completed, with the remaining two waiting on trial data to be collected in Summer 2016-17. This data will then be analysed, with key findings and recommendations to be outlined in the final report. It should be noted that milestones 1 and 3 have been achieved over four states (NSW, Vic, SA and WA) as there is insufficient SLN in Queensland to include in the project.

Case Study 17 – Bears Lagoon, Victoria

## Case Study 17 – Nil Desperandum

Bill Twigg, "Nil Desperandum", Bears Lagoon, Victoria

Bill Twigg has spent his life investing in the profitability of his third generation 2,300 ha property, in Central Victoria. His silverleaf nightshade control program includes a minimum of 3 herbicide applications per year.



The production system

Silverleaf nightshade

Control & Management Strategies

Bill's grandfather originally bought a 600ha in Central Victoria. It was passed on to his

Bill remembers exactly when SLN arrived in the area over 60 years ago, when a drover

Example of 18 farmer cases studies published to promote the successful management of SLN to other farmers to increase the adoption of the BMP strategies



# Our Projects

## Champions of Change - Farmers and their paddock trees

The humble paddock tree is a familiar sight across the farming landscape. Often hundreds of years in age, these landscape giants provide valuable shelter for livestock, crops, pastures, and wildlife. Unfortunately, the number of paddock trees is declining across Australia due to age, isolation, fire damage, and other stresses.

However, many farmers are seeking to address this decline by protecting their existing trees and encouraging the growth of new paddock trees on their properties. In June 2016 Murrumbidgee Landcare Inc. launched a new video featuring some of the inspiring work being done by farmers to arrest the decline in paddock trees and nurture future generations.

The film, *Champions of Change: farmers and their paddock trees*, features landholders and footage from across the Murrumbidgee catchment. John Hopkins, who runs a mixed farming operation at Illabo, said he thought too many people were focussed on planting new trees and not looking after their old paddock trees.



John Hopkins in his office

"We do both and we've probably done enough now, but it's addictive and once you start it's hard to stop. It just makes farming all that more enjoyable."

Wildlife Ecologist, Matt Herring, who produced the film, said it is always a pleasure to draw attention to the farmers who are doing such amazing work on their property.

"We hope the film inspires others to step up and ensure that the iconic paddock trees that are so characteristic of rural Australia don't become a thing of the past."

The film is punctuated by some light-hearted behind-the-scenes blooper footage of Mr Herring and fellow filmmaker, Nathan Smith. It was funded by the New South Wales Environmental Trust through a grant to Murrumbidgee Landcare Inc. and can be viewed on YouTube and the Murrumbidgee Landcare Inc. website.



A galah in a tree hollow



Matt Herring and Nathan Smith

