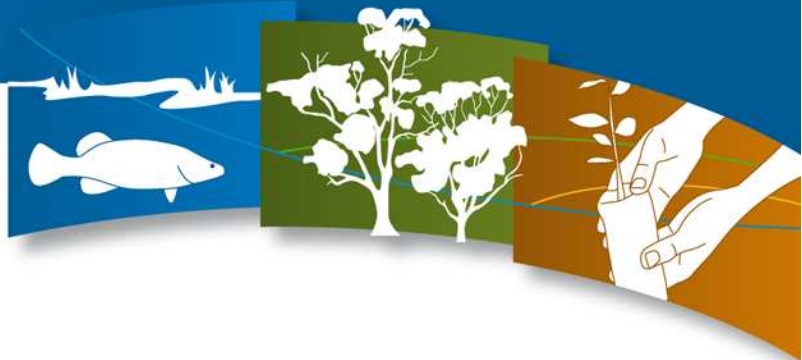


Loddon Stressed River Project Update



Connecting Rivers, Landscapes, People

Reflections from a Loddon River landholder

How incentives can improve farm management and river health

Rod Stringer, Yando



Our 700 acre property has been owned by the Stringer family for 53 years and farmed by a family partnership for 43 years. It is a mixed cropping and grazing enterprise, with 200 acres irrigation and 500 acres of dry-land divided into 14 paddocks. The property is watered by 13 dams plus water from the Loddon River.

In the past, the Loddon River was considered to be the life blood of ours and many other farms, and was a source of good water and shade. Quite often the river would overtop and fill dams and other low lying areas, irrigating large areas of cropping land and pasture. This provided ideal conditions for stock.

The prolonged run of dry seasons,, together with a more demanding regime of water harvesting throughout the river catchments, has led to a significant decrease in the volume of water available for the river and irrigation. On this farm, a dry river meant 400 of the 700 acres then had no water. The 13 dams, which were linked to the farm's irrigation, looked like taking too much of the extremely low water allocation to fill. With the river increasingly dry, it no longer acts as a boundary fence, is no longer a reliable water source and is in great danger of becoming an environmental disaster.

This farm needed a boundary fence, a reliable source of stock water and a healthy river system as a neighbour. This created a dilemma. However, there was help on offer from the North Central Catchment Management Authority (CMA) in conjunction with Department of

Primary Industries (DPI) and also Goulburn-Murray Water (G-MW). We were able to fence the river frontage to exclude stock from grazing the river banks – especially at times when they do the most harm – with the opportunity to use a controlled grazing regime as a management tool. Also on offer was alternate stock watering facilities to be supplied in the form of pipelines and troughs. Very attractive incentives were offered and we, and many other landholders, have participated.

There can be a problem with projects like this dragging on. Getting all the fencing done and troughs etc. in place is important so that you can actually shut the gates and keep the stock off the river bank. We decided to fence off the 2 km of river frontage, install a pressure pump and tank, about 2 km of pipe and six troughs. Eventually it all got done and now works surprisingly well. We then added more pipe and troughs to provide water to every paddock on the property.

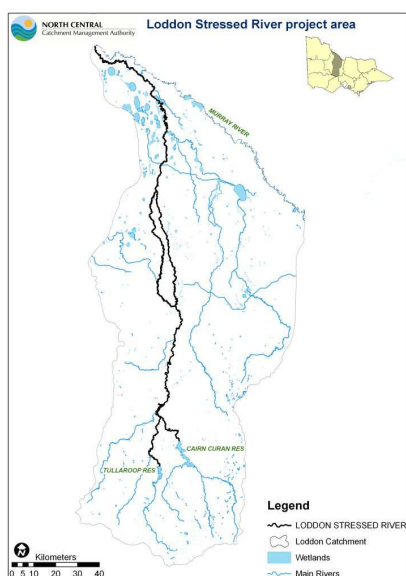
There are a number of advantages to running the property with a system like this. Water troughs mean fewer channels to maintain, and pipelines are easier and cheaper. Instead of having to fill 13 dams, on average at least twice per year, I can now fill one good dam three times per year. This dam serves the house and sheds, and also the pressure system supplying the stock water. I estimate I now use 6 megalitres instead of 45 megalitres, and can use these savings to grow extra produce, or can consider temporarily selling the water.

Stock seem to like drinking from troughs; they walk past most dams to get to one. If you have one paddock of crop and one with a large number of stock, then you can move the trough not being used to where it's needed. You can put troughs in whatever part of the paddock you need them. Stock running on troughs are easier to muster, so general farm management improves. Dam filling channels are always a nuisance to fence through. Using channels to fill a dam is extremely wasteful, as they often take or lose several times as much water as the dam itself. Even during very dry seasons and over a short time, there is improvement in the river bank. It's easy to see how river health will improve after the river overflows a couple of times.

Overall, the property has much more efficient water use, is easier to manage and therefore must be more profitable. The river frontage looks better, which adds to the value of the property.

Landholders should not assume that they are not eligible for grants or subsidies; they should contact the North Central CMA or DPI staff to find out what is available. They may be surprised.

What is the Loddon Stressed River Project?



The Loddon Stressed River project is a large-scale project designed to complement the delivery of environmental flows for the Loddon River downstream of Cairn Curran and Tullaroop reservoirs. The project focuses on protecting and rehabilitating riparian (or riverside) areas, community involvement and improving aquatic health and migration paths for native fish.

Project priority reaches

The Loddon River is considered a flow-stressed river and the project links closely with the Loddon Environmental Flows project. It gives consideration to impacts of drought and climate change, and strives for continual improvement of community and agency capacity and relationships.

The project, funded by the Victorian Government's *Large Scale River Restoration* program, has been running since 2003. Over the past five years, it has been jointly delivered by the North Central CMA and DPI, who have worked with local landholders to achieve considerable results, including:

- Over 200 km of river frontage protected by fencing
- Associated off-stream watering systems installed
- 110 ha of willow management
- 600 ha of revegetation and direct seeding beneath the River Red Gum canopy
- 3.8km of instream habitat improvement
- 12 bed and bank erosion control structures built.



Loddon River upstream of Kerang 2005. Photo: A Taylor, DPI.

Additionally, a range of community activities have taken place including field days and bus tours, supported by project publications. Protection works for blackfish and catfish have also been carried out.



Loddon River 2009 with increase in edge vegetation following stock exclusion. Photo: A Taylor, DPI.

Under a separate but related project, a \$500,000 fish ladder has been installed in conjunction with G-MW to enable fish migration past the Kerang Weir.

Project activities for 2009–10 include:

- working with landholders to provide fencing, off stream watering and revegetation of riparian areas
- development of a monitoring program for fish movement above Kerang Weir fishway
- identifying and protecting critical aquatic drought refuges
- identifying and assessing critical sites for aquatic habitat improvement
- control of Salt Cedar (*Tamarix ramosissima*) at Lakes Meran and Murphy
- willow management works.

The project is supported by members of the North Central CMA's community advisory committee, known as the Natural Resource Management Committee. They are Charlie Gillingham (Kerang), Laurie Maxted (Durham Ox) and Shane O'Loughlin (Laanecoore).

A project working group also exists, which meets every three months and provides advice on local issues, community engagement, technical information and relevant activities by other agencies. This group includes community, local government, DSE, DPI, Parks Victoria and G-MW representatives.

Onground works, contact with landholders and delivery of incentives is undertaken by both DPI staff (downstream of Durham Ox) and North Central CMA staff (upstream of Durham Ox). Currently these staff are Glen Thompson (DPI) and Glenn Merrick (North Central CMA).

Jon Leever of the North Central CMA is the overall project manager.

Contact details

For more information regarding this project, please contact the North Central Catchment Management Authority on (03) 5448 7124.

