



For the love of the land

TWO DECADES AFTER ITS LAUNCH, THE LANDCARE MOVEMENT – A UNIQUE PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN CONSERVATIONISTS AND FARMERS – INVOLVES 4000 GROUPS AROUND THE COUNTRY AND IS AS MUCH A SOCIAL AS AN ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT.

BY JESSE BLACKADDER

WHEN Pam Robinson left Ireland as a young woman to travel, she never thought she would end up as a fine-wool farmer in north-eastern Victoria – nor that she would be involved in the start of a radical movement that would change the face of Australia’s farming communities. “I was travelling in my gap year and ended up marrying into an Australian farming family,” she says. “In time I started looking closely at the countryside around my new home. I could see all was not well. It was the late 1970s and there were dying trees and patches of bare ground. The land was in trouble.”

Pam wasn’t the only person to notice. By the 1980s, policymakers, farmers and scientists alike were aware of the devastating impacts of land and water degradation. Australia’s fragile soils had been subjected to unsuitable European agricultural techniques. Since white settlement, about 20 billion trees had been cleared. The 1983 dust storm that engulfed Melbourne in thousands of tonnes of blown-away topsoil emphasised the message. Australia’s landscapes were in crisis. Something had to be done.

Across the country, communities, farming and conservation organisations, politicians, lobbyists and farmers were taking the first small steps. Pam and neighbouring farmer Angus Howell came up with the radical idea of bringing farmers into a group to work cooperatively on land conservation. “We called a meeting and as a result a conservation plan for our area was developed,” Pam says. “Then in 1983 we officially became the Warrenbayne Boho Land Protection Group Inc. Our first achievement was actually getting the group together, because it hadn’t been done before. It was really a pioneering time.”

Angus says they were privileged to be part of a groundswell of land managers across Australia who wanted to do something about land degradation. “These gatherings of rural people announced to all tiers of government that, from here on, they would take the initiative in managing and combating land degradation issues inside and outside their property boundaries and that they expected full government support for this work,” he says.

In Western Australia, following legislative changes, local communities set their own boundaries for soil conservation districts. They formed Land Conservation District Committees (LCDCs)

using an inclusive consultation process and involving volunteers.

In Victoria, the Potter Farmland Plan, funded by the Potter Foundation and run in partnership with the Victorian Government and farmers, was an important forerunner of Landcare. By 1986 the name ‘Landcare’ was officially coined in Victoria through an initiative of Minister for Conservation, Forests and Lands Joan Kirner, and president of the Victorian Farmers’ Federation Heather Mitchell.

A degraded grazing property at Winjallock, a small farming community near St Arnaud in central Victoria, became the launching place of the Landcare movement. The first farmer group (Winjallock Landcare Group) and the state Landcare program were launched in November 1986 at ‘Stricta Hill’, building on this groundswell of community support and activity.

‘Stricta Hill’ was a run-down, eroded grazing block with one last remaining casuarina tree standing sentinel on top of the hill. In a joint agreement, local farmers and the owner set about bringing the area back to a productive life through soil conservation, tree planting, rabbit control and pasture improvement. Winjallock Landcare Group is still active today and its president, Rhonda Fernandes, now owns ‘Stricta Hill’. “At the start it was in poor condition, very eroded, with gullies running all down the hill,” Rhonda says. “It looks very different today!”

In 1989 Rick Farley, of the National Farmers’ Federation, and Philip Toyne, of the Australian Conservation Foundation, believed that an alliance of farmers and ‘greenies’ was the way forward. “Conservationists and farmers were not seen as aligned on environmental issues – rather as natural enemies,” Philip says. “Indeed the differences, on issues such as land clearing, were real and somewhat intractable. It might have been an irresistible political alliance, but it was such an unlikely one – conservative farmers and radical greenies. Rick and I had agreed privately that a key to the success of the scheme was bipartisan support from both sides of politics. Rick worked on the farmers and the Coalition parties and I worked on the environment movement and the Labor ministers.”

Philip and Rick were successful in persuading then Prime Minister Bob Hawke to support the Landcare movement. The



A member of the “Carpentaria Ghost Net Program” removes a ghost net from the beach. TOP TO BOTTOM: Landcare award winner, Dick Cadzow, from Mount Riddock Station, NT; Pam Robinson, an Irish ex-pat committed to the fight against land and water degradation; participants in a Landcare climate-change workshop.

“New tyre for Compact 4WDs gives twice the mileage”



Cooper's new CS4 lasts the distance: “The ratings on the CS4 explain how it gives twice the mileage,” says Terry Smith of Exclusive Tyre Distributors.

America's Cooper Tires continue to take mileage to new lengths. But how do drivers gauge a tyre's lasting ability? And how can they decide which tyres offer better value for money?

“There is an easy way to compare the lasting ability of different tyres,” says Terry Smith of Exclusive Tyre Distributors. “Look at the sidewall of your tyres and you'll see three ratings. These are the ratings you need to compare when purchasing tyres. The higher the ratings, the more mileage, grip and safety you can expect.”

Tyre ratings help drivers

The rating system is called “Uniform Tyre Quality Grading” (UTQG). It originated in America to allow drivers to compare the quality of different tyres. The three critical ratings grade a tyre's tread wear, traction and temperature capabilities.

Terry Smith says, “The UTQG ratings are mandatory in the United States and can be found on most tyres sold in Australia.”

Independent testing

The ratings are determined after independent testing in the US. Drivers then use them to compare performance versus price.

The chart provided shows the ratings of the original tyres fitted to six popular Compact 4WDs/ AWDs compared with Cooper's new CS4.

For example, the original tyre fitted to the Nissan X-Trail has a treadwear rating of 300, compared with 780 for Cooper's CS4. This indicates the American tyre can give you up to 2.6 times more mileage.

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UTQG ratings show Cooper's CS4 tyre will give you up to twice the mileage of the original tyre.

Vehicle	Tyre Brand	Treadwear	Traction	Temp
Nissan X-Trail	Dunlop Grandtrek ST20	300	B	A
	Cooper CS4	780	A	A
Toyota Rav4 (2006 model)	Bridgestone Duefer HT 687	300	B	A
	Cooper CS4	780	A	A
Honda CRV	Bridgestone HT470	360	B	B
	Cooper CS4	780	A	A
Suzuki Grand Vitara	Bridgestone D687	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Cooper CS4	780	A	A
Suzuki SX4	Bridgestone ER300	320	A	A
	Cooper CS4	780	A	A
Subaru Forester (2006 model)	Yokohama G900	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Cooper CS4	780	A	A

N/A denotes UTQG ratings are not displayed on the tyre's sidewall.
www.coopertires.com.au

Federal Government, with bipartisan support, announced the 1990s as the ‘Decade of Landcare’ and committed \$320 million to fund the National Landcare Program. In July 1989, Landcare as a national initiative was launched by Prime Minister Hawke on the banks of the Wentworth River.

Another important player in the Landcare scene was also formed that year: Landcare Australia Ltd, a non-profit organisation that would act as the conduit between community Landcare and the corporate sector. “Our role was to provide promotional and fundraising support for the fledgling Landcare movement,” says Brian Scarsbrick, who was appointed CEO of the organisation in 1990 and still leads it today.

Landcare began a journey that its founders could barely have imagined. Twenty years after its formation there are 4000 Landcare groups around the country, involving 40 percent of farmers and influencing another 35 percent. Another 2000 Coastcare groups work on public land around the coastline.

Landcare Australia has recruited some of the country's biggest companies as corporate sponsors. It has raised millions of dollars for the Landcare cause and achieved an awareness of the ‘caring hands’ of Landcare in the urban population that would be the envy of many commercial brands.

What started as an environmental movement has also developed into a social movement. Landcare developed and matured into a highly sophisticated way of tackling the problems of land and water degradation – one that has become a model for countries around the world.

“There's no doubt Landcare's work has changed attitudes,” Brian says. “Twenty years ago many farmers wouldn't have considered increasing biodiversity on their properties and they barely spoke to local conservation groups. By contrast, now most farmers are building a balance between productivity and conservation. Landcare has touched most farmers in Australia in one way or another.”

For many of those farmers, Landcare has transformed them personally as well as repairing the landscapes in which they live. “The wonderful thing about the Landcare experience is that you can take it wherever you go,” Pam says. “You've got it for life. Anywhere and anytime you can do some ‘hands on’ with a group – no matter where you travel. I have a commitment to do this for all my life and plan to help someone, assist some group, and support our environment no matter where I am. I want to have planted some trees or pulled some weeds in every state and territory of Australia.”

For more information about Landcare go to www.landcareonline.com



Members of “Friends of Mt Majura”, in the ACT, with seedlings to plant.