

**SEARCH CRITERIA**

<b>Model</b>	Model A: Empowerment Model
<b>Industry</b>	Beef, Dairy
<b>Focus/Level</b>	Industry
<b>Outcomes</b>	Building management skills
<b>Special Interest Groups</b>	Other

**1. PROJECT TITLE:**

NSW Far South Coast River Bank Management Demonstration

**2.FUNDERS:**

Land & Water Australia & NSW Rivercare 2000 Incentives were key funders

**3.PROVIDERS:**

NSW Department of Land & Water Conservation (DLWC)

**4.KEY CONTACTS:**

Don McPhee, Senior Natural Resource Officer DLWC, Bega

**5.INDUSTRY/ISSUE/GEOGRAPHY:**

Dairy & Beef grazing properties in far south coast catchments – issue = protection of river banks

**6.PROJECT CONTEXT:**

Declining river health. River corridors in poor condition, exacerbated by cattle grazing leading to faecal contamination, vegetation decline, river bank and bed erosion and sedimentation.

Need to explore management options and develop demonstrations as first step in farm management culture change.

Social division between new settler (lifestyle) land holders who embrace landcare approach and old settler commercial farmers who see landcare as a 'greenie plot'. This division, exacerbated by the South East Forest protest movement has somewhat polarised the community and has largely worked against commercial farmers adopting the landcare approach. History of significant resistance to uptake of environmental programs on farms.

**7.PROJECT NICHE (SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES):**

- Explore grazing management and stock access and watering options within the bounds of farmer acceptability.
- Assess impacts of each option on river health
- Study farmer attitudinal changes as a result of the project
- Assess farm financial and economic factors associated with management options
- Longer term use of project findings in design of river health extension & implementation programs.
- Use of demonstration sites as extension assets in promoting culture change in future programs.

**8. PHILOSOPHY/APPROACH:**

- Deliberately chose to work with traditional, more conservative farmers who are usually seen as late adopters of environmental management / landcare approach.
- Aimed to work within these farmers' existing value framework and to develop management options which they were comfortable, rather than challenge them.
- Approach was to assess river health improvements arising from these 'farmer-acceptable' management options (eg strategic grazing of riparian land, stock watering points at 'safe' locations), with the view that such improvements would be more likely to be achieved across the catchments in future as there would be fewer barriers to adoption, compared with other more stringent recommended practices (eg total stock exclusion from riparian zones).
- Early attitudinal work identified that ~50% of landholders in a range of groups valued riparian land that was essentially in degraded condition (from a geomorphic stability and river health / biodiversity perspective). Rather than challenging and trying to change those value systems (as per most education and awareness programs) the philosophy was to work within existing value systems and see if they could achieve river health improvements (and they did!).
- Later attitudinal study identified a range of 'myths' which acted as barriers to acceptance and adoption of riparian management options. A key myth was "I can't afford that" and another was "weeds and vermin will infest fenced areas". The management options demonstrated were designed to be cost - neutral in terms of farm productivity, with the focus on strategic and careful management of stock access to fenced riparian zones. Economic assessment was able to demonstrate productivity and cost impacts for each site.
- A final product of the project was supposed to be a set of guidelines for riparian management. On reflection we decided to instead produce a set of 12 'Myth Busters' as leaflets, along with case studies of each of the participating farms. These were felt to be of greater strategic value to accelerating adoption than duplicating yet another set of technical guidelines.

**9. RESOURCES, MANAGEMENT AND STAFFING STRUCTURES:**

Principal Investigator (DLWC – funded) plus part – time project officer (LWA – funded). the project also made use of landcare support staff and local landcare group network to help do on-ground work. DLWC Economist conducted farm financial analysis.

**10. PROCESS/METHODS USED:**

The extension model for this project is based on Action Research.

**11. IMPACTS TO DATE (AND EVALUATION APPROACHES USED):**

Management options have proven effective at delivering desirable river health improvements whilst maintaining farm productivity. ie we think we have found the 'win/win' recipe for riparian management – the path of least resistance is yielding good river health results.

- Attitude changes were tracked using small focus group approach, followed up by one-one interviews with key participants.
- Several key myths were debunked during the project.
- However the fundamental values of participating farmers (epistemological and ontological approaches to the place of rivers in the scheme of farm management and their ecological functions) were not perceptibly shifted.

This does not seem important, given that there were good river health outcomes arising from working within these value frameworks in any case.

**12.EFFECTIVENESS:**

Effectiveness in the long term will be measured by any increases in the rate of adoption of demonstrated riparian management options. These options have now been built into agency extension and incentives programs as there is a degree of confidence that they will work and that they will be acceptable to the majority of 'late-adopters'.

**13.PROJECT DOCUMENTATION AVAILABLE:**

Final LWRRDC report to Riparian Lands Project (BVS1) should still be available on LWA web site.

**14.ISSUES:**

1997/98 drought here had a big impact on success of rehabilitation sites and farm finances. Droughts slow things down and affect farmer attitude / mood

**15.COMMENTS/CONCLUSIONS:**

Action Research approach worked well as an extension model. It needs to be included in the extension model mix. This was combined with a mix of personalised consultant and group facilitation.

Every extension project is probably a bit unique and needs to be able to have a range of approaches / models to select the right mix from.

Observation: there is a dearth of understanding of extension approaches and philosophies amongst practitioners and there is a lot of muddling through without adequately considering the best model / approach mix for the situation (I include myself in this group).

**16.REVIEW METHODS:**

Not sure – we will continue to monitor ecological performance at demonstration sites and may follow – up with attitudinal study in the future, to try to track any changes.