

Marg Agnew

How did you come to be involved in NRM?

Salt... Within 10 years of clearing our farm of native vegetation, bare areas appeared near existing natural salt lakes. Although we had been generous with the amount of vegetation that we left, this was not enough to keep the ground water under control. I had no idea about salinity until then, and took it quite personally that I had created the problem. It was during the next few years that I learnt more about salinity and how it originated. I often wondered why the land had been opened up for development when there was evidence in the wheatbelt of the repercussions of clearing. About the same time 'Landcare' was initiated in Victoria and I saw salinity was a far bigger issue than my backyard.

What are your biggest achievements in NRM?

Learning how to understand the landscape and our natural environment and working with these elements to farm productively for the present and the future. The vision of what I wanted to do as a farmer had to be thrown out and I had to take a reality check and work with the patchwork of soil types of our farm. To create a growing landscape made up of annuals, perennials, shelterbelts, trees and lakes is probably my reward for learning and doing something about the original problem of salinity. I drive around the farm today and I see a living, thriving environment that works with the vagaries of the weather and is resilient.

Who or what inspires you?

The land is my biggest inspiration. I enjoy the challenge of trying to overcome the elements and be ahead of the many issues the seasons, the land and



the weather throws at you. To try and establish new plants that have not been recommended or tried in the area and see them flourish or survive, inspires you to keep going. To move or build a new fence and see the benefits of productivity gains is rewarding. To see lambing ewes grazing amongst trees on cold wet winter days, that you have planted, inspires you to continue growing.

What do you hope to achieve in the next five years?

To continue farming in a similar way to the past but with the knowledge gained from nearly 30 years of experience to do it even better. The knowledge is out there, we just have to once again throw out tradition and use technology to help us improve how we farm already. I am enthusiastic to grow different trees this time around - trees that do not grow tall, fall over and drop limbs but provide more shelter. I would like to improve our fencing system so that it is farmer friendly, and more useful with stock grazing and movement of machinery.

What are the biggest challenges facing the South Coast environment and how can these be met?

I am a climate change sitter, but regardless of what is happening or not, we have to be on the front foot with working with the weather. We have come a long way in understanding how to farm with the seasons, but with profit margins narrowing, we still have to be careful of farming in a fragile environment.

Productivity and profitability is number one for most farmers. Somehow we have to marry both with caring for our environment. I think we need some lateral thinking and the support of government-funded research so that we have plants and animals that can grow in an ever changing landscape.