

# **Working with Lifestyle Landowners/Hobby Farmers: Workshop Outcomes**

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This workshop:

- set the scene for working with the lifestyle landowner/hobby farmer
- explored Heavenly Hectares and Great Gardens, two programs from Western Australia
- explored the NRM SEQ Socio-Economic Incentive Program
- gained the benefit of participant experiences
- explored key strategies for better engagement with the small landholder sector

The paper “Revival of the small acre farm: A new opportunity for maximising environmental returns from incentives” by Rod Safstrom and Dr. Sally Gomes-Trent provided a background and set the scene for the workshop. This paper was inspired by the vision of small landholders achieving vibrant sustainable communities.

Our challenge was to explore how to better work with lifestyle landholders and hobby farmers to achieve social, economic as well as environmental sustainability.

The workshop participants were mainly government practitioners at the coalface employed either by NRM regions or local councils.

## **The scene**

The scene is one of increasing development pressure at the urban/rural interface, a great diversity of landholders and a high property turnover rate.

Participants were asked to describe their small landholder clientele, which ranged from absentee professionals, trail bike riders, professionals with family connections to the land, hobby vineyards, subsistence farming, greenies, landcare enthusiasts and buyers of cheap land and a young single mum.

It was clear there was a lack of common interests and poor potential for a sense of community. How are we going to operate successfully with such a diverse group of landholders?

## **Heavenly Hectares**

This program targets the 40,000 hobby farmers in south-west Western Australia. This is a significant target group that:

- collectively manages a large land area (over 200,000 ha in the Swan Canning Catchment)
- often has limited land management skill and understanding
- is responsible for large amounts of pollutants entering our waterways (e.g. Ellenbrook Priority Catchment)

- often are involved in intensive and potentially polluting landuse activities (i.e. keeping of stock, intensive horticulture)

Heavenly Hectares has been successful in Western Australia because it has focused on the immediate needs of largely novice small landholders:

- pastures
- stock keeping
- weed, pest and disease management
- fire safety
- diversification options e.g. agro-forestry, orchards, grazing and cropping
- funding and technical support and assistance opportunities
- waterwise landscape management

It provides access to a wide range of free field days and workshops and extensive information on sustainable land management and follow up low cost one-day property management courses dealing with developing your own property management plan (an aerial photo of your own block is provided, which is a real winner).

The follow up courses provide opportunities for social interaction and identification of common interests, economic options are canvassed and key issues such as fire and weed management are addressed.

NRM SEQ Socio-Economic Incentive Package

- [www.regionalnrm.qld.gov.au/funding/](http://www.regionalnrm.qld.gov.au/funding/)

This program considers the 7 regional forces acting against sustainability:

- population
- waste
- bureaucracy
- communication
- economics
- short-sightedness
- self-interest

It then looks at the range of education self-regulation, grants and subsidies, new market based instruments and regulation types of incentives and uses the following guiding principles to select incentives:

- develop trust and communication
- develop flexible and tailored approaches
- recognise community values
- evaluation
- enhance existing programs
- the right mix of incentives
- foster innovation whilst seeking continuity of longer funding horizons and effective programs

The key process has been to define the areas of self-interest and what motivates people – social profiling. Using the ideas of Doug McKenzie-Mohr use whatever hook you can get – food, basic survival, incentives for volunteers, social contact, altruism – to achieve engagement. Success has been achieved by using what connects

people to achieve clusters of people. Understand what makes people connect and respond. What is the leveller? What sparks connections? Key qualities are being intuitive, non-judgemental, validating people and treating people with respect. Gaining cohesion and community identity has flow on effects for conservation.

### **Projects described by participants**

#### Community Health

Programs such as Beyond Blue (national NGO addressing depression), Wilderness Therapy, Community Gardens, The Outdoor Education (TOE) Victorian Government work in a cross-disciplinary approach connecting mental health with natural environment initiatives.

#### Sustainability Street (Victoria)

Groups of people hold street meetings weekly or fortnightly to access water, waste and garden information to improve practices at home.

#### Community Streams

Similar to Sustainability Street.

#### Sustainable Gardening Australia

SGA is a not for profit association totally committed to achieving real, continually improving and easily understood environmental solutions for gardeners  
[www.sgaonline.org.au](http://www.sgaonline.org.au)

#### Goulburn Catchment (Victoria)

Farm planning, marketed at lifestyle hobby farmers and non-residential owners. Owners are targeted through the media and activities timed to suit participation e.g. filed days on weekends, Fridays before school holidays. Timing is very important.

#### City of Whittlesea (Victoria)

33 seminars per year targeting gardening, composting, land management, energy, water. A database of attendees is kept and water talks are successful. A land management expo c-run with other groups has been very successful. There is a range of displays, most organisations donate time and there is a range of guest speakers with practical sessions, and workshops (which are fully booked). A weed expo goes out in a bus and gets people involved. There is a good uptake of incentive programs such as rate rebates. There is not a good response to local law and weed uptake issues. A good GIS database tracks information on properties, what they are involved in, attendances, weeds etc. Local government is playing a critical role.

#### Melbourne Water

A number of grants programs for landholders specifically oriented to healthy waterways in most of the Port Phillip and Westernport catchments. Mainly fencing, planting of indigenous species and weed management.

#### Shire of Melton(Victoria)

Considerable effort goes to people who are interested and assisting them with a rate rebate scheme. Also dealing with difficult people who lack knowledge and are often

distrustful of government. It can be challenging to get them to do the right thing with weeds etc.

#### Mt Lofty Ranges Initiative (South Australia)

This program recognises the high knowledge of landholders and starts with a monitoring framework to help people see their successes. They can see where they stand on the benchmarks, where they need to go and how relatively intact their biodiversity is. A manual has 3 components – how to do it, the thinking behind it, and the actual vegetation in the region. A monitoring and evaluation framework is provided as well as training. Keys are working through groups, asking people what they want and getting ownership from people. Capacity of groups to respond differs. Property management planning courses are tailored to the local community.

#### Cardinia Environment Coalition, Westernport Catchment (Victoria)

Concern about council amalgamations and loss of ‘community’ led to local environment organisations (advocacy, Landcare, Friends) forming a coalition to both apply for NHT et al on ground grants as a network, and advocate for better policy at local council level.

#### Ecoproperty (New South Wales & Victoria)

Ecoproperty is a commercial venture focusing on properties for sale that have an ecological value. Services include property assessment and rating, training advice, directory of products and professionals. People want to know if they are doing the right thing. Workshops are being developed to give guidelines to help people ecovalue their property.

### **Workshop outcomes**

The workshop focused on social drivers to achieve successful engagement with the small landholder community. A clear outcome was the need to identify and respond to landholder needs if successful engagement is to be achieved.

The key issues for small landholders were being time poor, their thirst for knowledge and the lack of connectedness with the local community.

Key programs discussed in the workshop – Heavenly Hectares, Great Gardens, Sustainability Street and NRM SEQ with its powerful guiding principles – are all successfully engaging with small landholders because they start with recognising people’s needs.

It was clear that local government is already playing a significant role and the lessons from this workshop could be spread to other shires on the urban fringes. NRM groups could work collaboratively with shires to achieve their objectives.

A support network is required that could assist practitioners with enforcement as well as a motivational role.

### **Key points to achieve community engagement (especially for council employees)**

- need an element of fun, froth and bubble to engage people
- listening and acknowledgement, validation, respect are critical skills

- one-stop shop near where people go all the time (shop, trailer expo, and/or provision of a case manager/mentor)
- work with common interest groups, develop clusters of people
- design incentives for people on the Bell curve of social change
- resolve time poor problem by providing access to a labour force, local help, Green Corps, Work for Dole
- contractors can be a resource, they may need training and brokerage, coordination role may assist
- enforcement of regulations is a challenge and there is a need to make people aware of their responsibilities
- consider ways to connect private, business and government
- sell environmental values as an advantage, win/win

### **Future directions**

- local government has great potential to implement sound incentive and engagement programs as they have the records, local knowledge and long term experience
- working with developers and planning departments to get better design and outcomes prior to land release
- work with estate agents to encourage greater pre-purchase knowledge
- provide peer support among practitioners, particularly those with regulatory role
- celebrate successes, form support groups, share best practice

### **Key quotes**

“Went out and asked people what they wanted! Work on that and then we bring in the things that we might want.”

“Introduce people in a fun interactive way, convenient locations. Showing people that it’s not just the right thing to do. Inspire people with visions of what their land can look like. Start to understand their issues.”