



**Western Murray
Land Improvement Group**

ANNUAL REVIEW FY20-21





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David McDonald **Chair, WMLIG**

On behalf of the community and members of the Western Murray Land Improvement Group, I would like to thank and compliment the committee and staff for their contribution to a successful year. It has been pleasing to see a major transition from a situation where we have had to devote considerable resources to securing funding and partners with funds, to now being engaged by entities who recognize Western Murray Land Improvement Group's unique capacity as partners in delivering their products and services.

Our range of activities and services has expanded and become more complex, and we have and are incorporating new management practices and systems to improve our efficiency as we move forward.

We have been most fortunate in recruiting new staff during the year with Leona Chan, Kathleen Kolden, and Kaitlyn Powell joining the organisation. They have all brought new skills and dynamics to the group and we warmly welcome them. We wish departed staff Lydia Grant and Kate O'Neill the very best in pursuing their respective careers and interests and thank them for their contribution.

A MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIR

Laura Kaylock also stepped down from her position on the staff and we would like to thank her for her valuable contributions as an employee, and we look forward to her continued support in a voluntary role as secretary on the committee. This year we also welcomed new board members, Katrina Myers (Vice-Chairperson), Ian McConnell and Bill Ricketts and we are grateful for their contribution of knowledge and diverse skills.

The past twelve months have continued to lay foundations for constructive future developments and opportunities for Western Murray Land Improvement Group and we can look forward to that with confidence.

Thanks again to the members, staff and board for your ongoing support.



Roger Knight **Executive Officer, WMLIG**

Writing the annual report is always a time of great reflection for me and this year is no different. 2020-21 has been a year of growth, success, change and challenge. The team and I are heading into the new year with a positive outlook on all that can be achieved by our community.

Western Murray Land Improvement Group is a progressive not-for-profit Landcare group and registered charity, and our vision is to promote sustainable farm and land management practices that enhance our unique natural environment through innovation, education, and strong community networks.

Despite the challenging climate of the past year, we have made significant improvements to all areas of our business performance measured against our Strategic Plan. This year the team has delivered 82 activities including workshops, field days, and project stakeholder planning sessions. We seek to strike a balance between agricultural productivity and natural resource management (NRM) deliverables and have achieved this in relative balance as well as providing capacity building and opportunities to the wider community and economy as well.

Highlights for the year include;

- funding application success rate of 82 per cent with a total of 18 successful application for the year;
- 30 per cent of secured funding a result of being approached by other entities and organisations;
- annual turnover increase from \$586,000 to \$1.14M from 10 different funding partners. An increase of 195 per cent year-on-year;
- 1185 participants attending our events throughout the year, an increase of 165 per cent year-on-year

A MESSAGE FROM OUR CEO

With such exponential growth and development, we have identified the need for a more stable income stream to counter the reliance on the cyclical nature of funding. We also recognise the need for more future scenario and adverse event planning. As a result, we have recently developed a new three-year strategic plan which will be implemented from 2021-2024. We will be scoping up and implementing a number of community-led projects. This will include activities that build capacity and resilience to prepare for and recover from adverse events such as drought, as well as arming our community with the knowledge of future trends and opportunities.

The rapid rate of growth in the past year has put considerable pressure on our board and staff, and the hard work and diligence that is integral to meeting the challenges presented does not go unrecognised. Every day we are learning about how to deliver new projects, improving management processes, systems, and governance.

This year we have inducted, trained, and mentored new starters at the rate of around one person every three months which has been very challenging, but rewarding in a tight labour market for the skill sets sought for the diversity of our business needs. We welcomed staff members Lydia Grant, Leona Chan, Kathleen Kolden, and Kaitlyn Powell, and said goodbye to Kate O'Neill, Jeanette Walker, and Lydia Grant and Laura Kaylock. I would like to thank them for their enormous contribution to the organisation. I would also like to acknowledge new Board members Katrina Warne, Bill Ricketts, and Ian McConnell.

We look forward to the next 12 months and delivering upon projects that support our community and assist to build our community in advance.

ABOUT US

Western Murray Land Improvement Group, is a not-for-profit Landcare group and registered charity based in Barham, NSW, located beside the Murray River and operating across diverse bushland, agricultural, and floodplain landscapes. We were established in 2003 by a group of local farmers who recognised the importance of sustainable agriculture practices with a focus on local Landcare and management systems.

Today, we have 8 staff members, a committee of 11 members, and have held events and activities for 1,185 community members in the local area. As a Landcare group we promote sustainable agriculture and responsible Natural Resource Management. We respond to community needs, recognising the unique challenges that our community of local landholders and farmers face.

We represent the region as part of Murray Landcare in the New South Wales Murray Catchment. Our Landcare Coordinators are currently delivering the 2019-2023 Landcare NSW Program. The program aims to empower community to take action on issues and deliver outcomes across both locally and regionally.

Our area of operation covers approximately 750,000 ha within the Murray River Council Local Government Area. We support 13 local Landcare, producer and indigenous groups through a range of projects and mentoring services. We are one of the largest groups in the area, having built expansive networks with community, industry and external stakeholders. We have a proud record of delivering applied research, development and extension projects to our community.



A man wearing a yellow hard hat and a green long-sleeved shirt is standing on a muddy bank next to a body of water. He is pointing his right arm towards the water. The background is filled with tall, thin trees, possibly eucalyptus, with dense green foliage. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

OUR VISION

To promote sustainable farm and land management practices to enhance our unique natural environment through innovation, education, and strong community networks.

2020-2021 HIGHLIGHTS

Annual turnover



\$1.143m

Retained earnings



\$70k

Staff employed



8 (5.6 FTE)

Local contractors



6 (0.5 FTE)

Active projects



32

Events & activities



82

Activity participants



1,185

Groups supported



13

Funding partners



18

Revegetation area



10

Number of trees planted



74ha

Number of trees planted



5,325

OUR BOARD

Our board is made up of 11 volunteer community members with broad skill sets. Our board members represent the geographical expanse of our organisation and have well connected networks that represent the diversity of local community needs. Our board oversees the strategic direction of our organisation.



David McDonald
Chairperson



Katrina Myers
Vice-Chairperson



Laura Kaylock
Secretary



Helen Collins
Assistant Secretary



Kate Redfearn
Treasurer & Public Officer



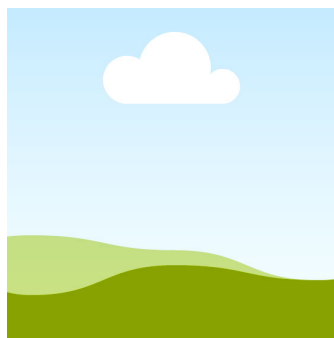
Faye Ashwin
Board Member



Rick Ellis
Board Member



Neil Maddy
Board Member



Bill Ricketts
Board Member



Nick Warne
Board Member



Ian McConnell
Board Member

For a current list of
our board members
head to our [website](#)

OUR TEAM

As of June 30, Western Murray Land Improvement Group employed a team of 8 staff totalling 5.6 full time equivalents (FTE). The team come from diverse backgrounds and have a broad range of skills spanning agriculture, natural resource management, community capacity building, administration, bookkeeping, marketing and communications and more. We pride ourselves on fostering a supportive, social, and collaborate culture.



Roger Knight
Executive Officer & Local
Landcare Coordinator



Amy Lolicato
Local Landcare Coordinator



Leigh Fletcher
Agrisystem Development Coordinator
& Environmental Project Officer



Kaitlyn Powell
Assistant Project Officer



Stacey Brooke
Local Landcare Coordinator



Kate Redfearn
Accounts



Leona Chan
Marketing and
Communications Officer



Kathleen Kolden
Administrative Coordinator
and Community Support
Officer (Murray Connect)

For a current list of
our staff head to
our [website](#)

OUR COMMUNITY & ENGAGEMENT

Our community

Our community are at the heart of everything we do. We aim to deliver projects and activities that will enhance their capacity, improve wellbeing, and build resilience across the agriculture and Natural Resource Management areas.

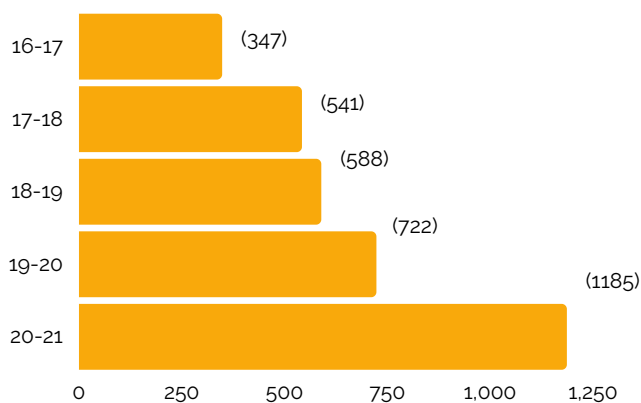
In order to determine areas of interest, we conduct regular surveys to determine community needs and interests. This allows us to streamline our efforts in obtaining funding and develop a program that will have the most impact for our community.

We currently have 500 contacts within our database and 750 contacts across our social media platforms.

In 2021-22 we will be revamping our membership strategy and offering, making being a member of Western Murray Land Improvement Group more valuable moving into the future.

Community engagement

In 2020-21 we held 82 activities which involved 1,185 participants. As the graph below indicates, our participation levels have seen huge growth in the past five years increasing from 347 engagements in 2016-17 to 1,185 this year.



Activity participation levels in 2016-2021

We keep our community informed with regular communications via our mailing lists, newsletters, advertising in local papers, local radio, maildrops, and keeping our website updated with upcoming events and projects.





SUPPORTED GROUPS

As well as supporting and providing opportunities to our local farmers we also support several local Landcare, community, and other not-for-profit groups.

Our support ranges from assisting with grant applications, partnering on capacity building workshops, administration, and governance support.

Local groups we supported in 2020-2021 include

- Central Murray Best Wool Best Lamb
- Barham Landcare
- Wakool Rivers Association
- Wakool Food Network Group
- Edward Wakool Angling Association
- Moulamein Cropping Group
- Murrakool Land for Wildlife
- Young Country Networkers
- Joint Indigenous Group
- Border Flywheelers
- Barham Angling Club
- Koondrook Perricoota Alliance
- Barook Code Club

If you are part of a local community group and are interested in partnering or need support setting up your group, please get in touch with us.

OUR PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES

This year our team worked on 32 projects. Our projects and activities are split into three categories, natural resource management, agriculture, and community. We aim to strike a balance between these areas of focus, ensuring that our community gets the maximum impact of a balanced program.

32



Natural Resource Management

Activities and projects that relate to the protection and improvement of environmental assets such as soils, water, vegetation, and biodiversity.

Agriculture

Activities and projects that relate sustainable approach to integrated land management and building resilience in farming systems, productivity improvement, and best management practices.



Community

Activities and projects relating to community capacity building, social networking and wellbeing.

CASE STUDIES

GEE GEE BRIDGE REVEGETATION

Western Murray Land Improvement Group in consultation with Murray River Council and Roads and Maritime Services NSW worked together to develop a plan to transform this an unused and degraded site beside the newly developed Gee Gee Bridge back to a healthy and revegetated landscape. The detailed project plan included sowing groundcovers and planting endemic plant species, and eliminating pest and competing weed species.

Preparations of the site included:

- deep ripping, spreading of embankment materials
- spreading of gypsum to assist in breaking down the compacted soils
- spreading of topsoil to rebalance the soils that have been heavily burdened by compaction and construction

The site was then prepared for the planting of 1,100 tube stock which involved creating wide depressions with central holes for the plants. Creating a depressed area for each plant meant that we could maximise water harvesting from subsequent rainfall events, allowing maximum moisture to be captured.

The tube stock was then planted at the site and watered in immediately. Plant guards were installed on each individual plant for protection. A fence was also erected providing further protection of the area from pest pressure.

Since planting, we have been fortunate enough to have received rain events at all the right times which has helped the project so far to be a great success. Manual watering will occur when needed over Spring and Summer to ensure the plants continue to survive and grow.



1,100 locally grown endemic plant species planted



6 months of ground preparation and project planning occurred prior to planting



13 community members participated in the tube stock planting day



Continuous site monitoring to ensure the ongoing success



WAKOOL AGRI-INNOVATION PROGRAM

The Wakool Agri-Innovation Program is designed to help farmers and businesses to explore opportunities to innovate, diversify, and value-add in their businesses. The overall aim of this program is to encourage regional prosperity and opportunity by supporting the development of high value agricultural, food, and tourism sectors.

There are two components to the project, Capacity Building and Agrisystem

Capacity Building:

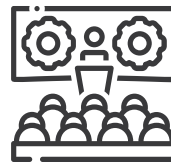
The Capacity Building component of this project incorporates education, training, business development, innovation, and leadership programming to stimulate professional development, diversification, and economic prosperity in the Wakool region.

Agrisystem:

The Agrisystem area of the project maintains a focus on boosting regional economy and supporting local producers to explore new opportunities within their existing businesses.

This program is funded by the Australian Federal Government via the Murray Darling Basin Economic Development Program. WMLIG successfully obtained this funding in 2019. Project activities commenced in 2020, and are due for completion in April 2022.

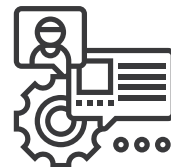
In 2020-21 of this program we delivered



1 Innovation Forum



10 capacity building workshops



1 Business Development Program



1 Industry Tour

POLLACK ENHANCEMENT PROJECT

The Pollack Swamp is a 700ha flora and fauna nature reserve in the Gunbower-Koondrook-Perricoota Forest. Historically occupied by the Barapa Barapa people, the swamp is thought to have once been an ecologically rich area. Since the regulation of the Murray River, the frequency and duration of flooding within the Pollack has been dramatically reduced.

As a result of declined flooding, the area has seen a drastic decline in wildlife. A recently introduced environmental watering program has seen improvements to the area, with wildlife such as native fish and birds returning to the area to live and breed. A team including local environmental and wildlife specialists, Moama Local Aboriginal Land Council staff, local Landcare and community members have worked to improve its ecological condition.

As part of this funding program, we have organised a range of work including pest and weed control, revegetation work and community engagement activities. A major component of the community

engagement has been to provide on-ground opportunities for local community members to witness and discuss the delivery and outcomes from environmental water. Throughout the project we have hosted tours engaging community members, schools, local landholders and other stakeholders.

The Pollack Enhancement Project has led to a community vision more broadly for the Koondrook Perricoota Forest:

"A healthy working forest where native species can flourish, and where local communities can connect and co-manage the forest for future generations."

We are passionate about supporting the community and see their vision of the forest come to life.

In 2020-21 we carried out



2 community tours



10ha revegetation



2 information sessions



1 community vision workshop



For more information about our work at the Pollack head to www.westernmurraylig.org/the-pollack-swamp-enhancement-project

MURRAY CONNECT TRIVIA NIGHT

In small rural communities like Barham, community wellness and looking out for each other is an important task. Murray Irrigation Limited Community Grants allowed us to organise a social occasion bringing the community together for a Trivia Night hosted at our coworking space and community hub Murray Connect, all for the added good cause of raising money for Barham Local Health Medical Trust.

Local farmer, and business owner, and WMLIG Vice Chair Katrina Myers and her husband Tim volunteered their time to host the event. Katrina spoke of the importance of fostering healthy conversations around mental health and looking out for each other. In what had been a turbulent year for many due to the pandemic, the conversation starter couldn't have come at a more suitable time.

Teams battled it out over six rounds including sport, medicine, pop culture, music, geography, and general knowledge, with a bonus local knowledge question in each round. There was plenty of debate especially around the number of pubs in the old Wakool Shire. The "guess the next line of the song" questions in the musical round proved tough, but got people singing along and dancing in their seats.

Highlights included:



\$1,800 raised for
our local medical
health trust



Community
members attended



MURRAY CONNECT

Murray Connect is a project and vision of Western Murray Land Improvement Group. It is not only our workspace but also a community hub funded by the Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal (FRRR) Tackling Tough Times Together program. The space welcomes individuals, students, groups, and businesses. Murray Connect exists to support its community by providing a productive, versatile, and accessible space.

Funding from FRRR has allowed WMLIG to employ a Community Support Officer, who provides the local community with administrative guidance, IT help, grant writing support, job application advice, and research assistance.

Some services that are provided at Murray Connect include:

- Hot desk hire
- Meeting room hire
- Private office hire
- Information support
- Reliable Wi-Fi
- Printing & copying services
- Funding application support
- Video conferencing
- Community events

In 2020-21 the Murray Connect spaces have been booked 86 times. Our space that is most demand is our Meeting Room. The Meeting Room has been used to host many community groups, government agencies and other organisations.



For more information about Murray Connect head to www.murrayconnect.com.au.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 2021-2024

The background

With strong growth and significant development over the past year, a renewed strategic direction has been established in a three-year plan. This includes a renewed vision, and a revised set of values and objectives.

The team got together over two afternoons to help frame and detail our strategic direction and it was then presented to our board.

The strategic direction recognises the importance of looking forward and helping community development. We will continue to capacity build in order to improve industry output and contribute to the local economy. We also want to continue and build momentum of projects in the NRM area and look for new opportunities to develop as a whole.

Our vision

To enrich our community through the power of innovative thinking and sharing knowledge.

Our values

Integrity

Trust

Respect

Empowerment

Collaboration

Our objectives

1. Ensuring good governance and the economic viability of the organisation
2. Delivering effective NRM, environmental and agricultural programs that build resilience for our future
3. Building trusted and respectful relationships
4. Demonstrating innovation and best practice
5. Creating a platform for the exchange of transformational ideas and capacity building
6. Empowering our community through facilitating collaboration and exploring opportunities
7. Celebrating and sharing our stories and experiences
8. Communicating our local agricultural and NRM priorities to policy and decision makers

FUTURE PROJECTS

We're always looking to the future! Some projects that our team will be scoping out in 2021-22 and beyond include:

Community-owned Energy Retail Hub

Investigating the viability to facilitate energy retailing, helping the community be more self sufficient and a prepared in the case of fire, flood or other adverse event.

Development of a regional brand

Utilising the 'River Country' geographic indicator to develop and grow a regional produce brand for the Murray River region. Further opportunities include a food trading platform, distribution and marketing ecosystem,

Community Foundation and Community Water Bank

Scoping out the viability of a community foundation as a portal for donations to deliver local projects and leverage dollar-for-dollar funding. Potential to accept bequests and donations from individuals and businesses that want to support the community that have supported them,

Regen Farmers Mutual environmental goods and services market

Running a pilot program for Regen Farmers Mutual, an Australian farmer-owned mutual that establishes opportunities to take advantage of land stewardship ethical investment carbon and biodiversity offset and incentives,

Development of an Agri-Innovation Precinct

Further scoping into a precinct that would serve as incubator for new ideas, products and industries, helping to identify viable commercial opportunities.

Further scoping work to be completed looking at value adding opportunities for market sectors experiencing high growth such as plant proteins and fortified and functional products have been identified as key opportunities by CSIRO (2019).



Stay up to date with our projects by visiting www.westernmurraylig.org/current-projects or subscribe to our [newsletter](#)

Thank You!

To our members and local community. We thank you for your continued support.

We look forward to continuing to offer a valuable contribution to our community.

As a charity and not-for-profit organisation, the support and generosity of our community enables us to continue working toward our vision and in turn deliver positive outcomes back into our community.

A special thanks to all our funding partners for 2020-2021 which include:

- Department of Agriculture, Water Resources and Environment
- Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal
- Local Government NSW
- Murray Irrigation Limited
- Murray Local Land Services
- Murray Darling Basin Authority
- Murray River Council
- NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust
- NSW Forestry Corp
- NSW Landcare
- NSW Roads and Maritime Services
- Charles Sturt University

Want you can do to support us:

Become a member
Tell your family or friends about us
Attend our events
Sign up to our mailing list
Make a donation





Western Murray Land Improvement Group

To find out more about what we do call or visit

03 5453 1577

www.westernmurraylig.org