



Getting back to nature

Cotton growers working together for a sustainable landscape: Namoi Valley Case study.

Snapshot project of achievements:

- 27 farmers are looking after biodiversity on their farms
- 66,000 hectares of natural vegetation is being managed under best practise
- 122 farmers have improved their natural resource management knowledge and skills

Social networking

In the Namoi valley a pilot project has trialled exciting new ways to engage growers and their families in managing natural vegetation on their farms under best practise. Engagement has focused on families using existing social networks and has proven to be very successful.

A spotlighting night along the Namoi River was also well supported with just over 100 people turning up for the enjoyable and educational events. The warm, spring conditions were perfect for both events and the kayakers were lucky enough to spot plenty of wildlife as they paddled down the river, including water rats, snakes and a wide variety of birdlife from small finches to large eagles.

Ecologist Phil Spark captured a wide variety of local wildlife, including eight types of frog, six species of bat and lots of reptiles, to amaze all with the animals that live on cotton farms.

“The Namoi River has a rich diversity and abundance

of wetland and woodland fauna. It is the only location where I have recorded the three owls; Barking owl, Boobook owl and Barn owl together, and it is particularly significant for its population of Pale-headed snakes and abundance of Brushtail possums. Unfortunately the riparian habitat is threatened by numerous exotic weeds which are rapidly invading and displacing native plants,” Phil Spark said.

According to CottonInfo NRM technical specialist Stacey Vogel, *“The events have been a great way to showcase to landholders some of the amazing diversity of native animals and plants we have here. Working with social networks who are comfortable around one other and enjoy getting together makes these events very special occasions.”*

Managing biodiversity

Farmers participating in these events have gone on to:

- Develop and implement a three year Feral Pig Management Plan which covers 66,000 hectares in total, including 13,000ha of endangered Coolibah Blackbox Woodland;
- Establish a biodiversity planting and education area at Burren Junction;
- Install 36 artificial nesting boxes across 12 farms;
- Benchmark native vegetation and biodiversity on 20 farms.

Lessons learnt

“Using this approach in this western regions has been very successful, it has enabled us to engage with landholders we previously had not



and has helped us get on farms so that we can start conversations with them about managing their natural assets under best practice. While we developed these programs around two existing social networks the style of the workshops has appealed to a much wider audience. The key to them being a success is that they are relevant to NRM targets we are trying to achieve and they are social, fun and free,” Stacey Vogel said.

Acknowledgements

The Cotton Growers Working together for a Sustainable Landscape project has brought growers together to contribute to the ongoing conservation and protection of biodiversity in their districts. This project was supported by the Cotton Research and Development Corporation, through funding from the Australian Government and the Namoi Catchment Management Authority.

Contact

Stacey Vogel, CottonInfo NRM technical specialist

Email: staceyvogel.consulting@gmail.com

Tel: 0428 266 712

Jane Trindall, R&D Manager, Cotton Research and Development Corporation

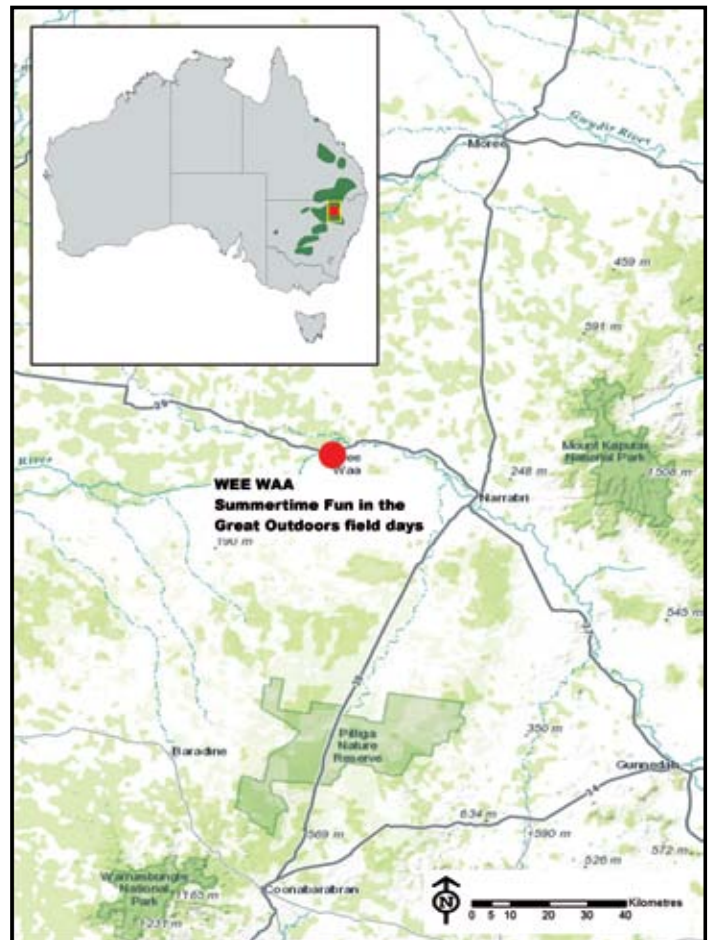
Email: jane.trindall@crdc.com.au

Tel: 02 6792 4088



PHOTO COURTESY STACEY VOGEL

Adults and children alike enjoyed the Namoi River spotlighting night.



Map of project area with inset map of cotton growing areas.

Jacqui Warnock, a cotton grower from Narrabri and one of the participants of the Kayak trip loved it so much she wrote a poem about her adventures on the day: *Out and about Adventure*
“...Green veg on the banks and tress reach overhead,
Gnarled roots and bird hollows in timber that’s dead,
Wind through the tree tops, Cockatoos loudly screech,
Kingfisher and Cormorant, Phil’s python to reach
And freak Stacey who thought it was coming aboard!
(Paddling with the naturalist, t’was her reward!).