

The lasting impacts: Pratt Foundation FRRR water projects



Message from FRRR

The Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal (FRRR) began partnering with the Pratt Foundation in 2002 to help realise the vision held by the late Richard Pratt for more efficient water use and healthier ecosystems in Australia.

The generous financial partnership from the Pratt Foundation allowed FRRR to act as a connector and conduit to work with rural, region and remote Australia to reinforce the economic strength, build social resilience and repair degraded landscapes and waterways.

There were thirty community projects from across Australia funded through this partnership – ranging from local initiatives to improve irrigation and sanitation at community facilities, to ambitious projects spanning the entire Murray-Darling Basin designed to effect large-scale social and environmental change.

For this report, we revisited five of the funded projects that reflect the diverse size and scale of funding to explore the legacy of targeting grants at community-led water projects.

We have structured them around five themes that reflect common outcomes, from highly localised solutions to large-scale improvements in water management and land use.

- 1. The Pace Setter** is proof that investing in people fosters the industry leadership necessary to tackle the complex water use challenges facing Australia.
- 2. Nationally Significant** illustrates how a small project became a model of community engagement that is now replicated around Australia.
- 3. Social Strength** is an example of the importance of good partnerships in generating community-led changes in attitude and behaviour.

4. Now and Then looks at the long-term land use change that continues to benefit the environment.

5. Bolstering the Region demonstrates that economic benefits have been generated through investment in more efficient farming practices.

The projects evolved as circumstances changed, but each still credits early investment from the Pratt Foundation as critical to turning a community vision into reality.

Working in partnership with our donors and with the communities themselves helps us to identify and invest in the projects that will have actual impact. Revisiting these projects has solidified this thinking. We shouldn't be making assumptions, but rather having more adaptive and community centred approaches to improve life in rural, regional and remote Australia.



Natalie Egleton

Natalie Egleton
CEO, FRRR



Alexandra Gartmann

Alexandra Gartmann, former CEO,
FRRR April 2011 - October 2015

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The lasting impacts report includes links to voice and video content from key representatives from the projects we cover. We encourage you to watch these films and listen to this audio, as it is the voices of the people on the ground who bring to life the impact the FRRR and Pratt Foundation partnership has had in their communities.

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Alexandra Anthony

Murray-Darling Leadership Scholarships,
Australian Rural Leadership Program

\$100,000

2003
to
2005



▲ *Scholarship recipient Alexandra Anthony.*

These days only a small part of Alexandra Anthony's work involves water.

As acting chair of Local Land Services New South Wales, she also oversees natural resource management, biosecurity and agricultural production.

But it was developing an understanding of water issues and policy that's been critical to shaping her career and professional influence.

Ms Anthony was a 2005 recipient of the Murray-Darling Basin Leadership Scholarship. The Pratt Foundation funded one scholarship each year from 2003 to 2005.

"That experience has influenced my career in every way possible," she said.

"It was a catalyst to step into the policy space and it was run by the Australian Rural Leadership Foundation, and they are second to none in Australia and perhaps even in the world.

"It opened the door to managing risk, working through what policy looks like and how you can influence policy."

In the decade since completing the program, Ms Anthony has been a key player in high level water reform and policy development in the Murray-Darling Basin.

In her roles with the Murray-Darling Basin Commission Community Advisory Committee and the Murray Catchment Management Authority, she has been a critical conduit between the community and governments at NSW state and federal levels.

"We've actually driven policy," she said.

"We presented to Ministerial Council at one stage and there were some pivotal things that made a difference to everyone's life today."

Ms Anthony is particularly proud of her role in arguing for water entitlements to retain security characteristics when traded to the Commonwealth for environmental flows.

Ms Anthony's professional networks continue to grow, but she remains in contact with many of those she met through the Australian Rural Leadership Foundation and intends to continue her work in natural resource management for many years to come. ■

My RiverR: engaging the next generation OzGreen

My RiverR: OzGREEN

.....
\$40,000 in 2002

\$35,000 in 2007
.....

It was a genuine concern for the ecological health of the Murray-Darling Basin that triggered the development of the My RiverR initiative back in 2002.

OzGREEN Chief Executive and founder Sue Lennox called on her 15 years of experience in citizen science and youth engagement to develop a program that encouraged young Australians to drive change in the Basin.

The objective of My RiverR was to educate, empower and engage young people to bring about large-scale change across the entire river system.

Over the next eight years, with funding from the Pratt Foundation and others, six whole-of-river basin programs were delivered across the Murray, Darling and Murrumbidgee catchments.

"We went from the top of the catchment to the bottom of the catchment and worked with communities all along the river to do detailed ecological assessments," Ms Lennox said.

These assessments culminated in a community-run Youth Engagement Congress that saw young people in regional areas developing a vision to improve the ecological health of their river basin.

"I think it was quite a remarkable piece of work, quite frankly - to conduct a citizen science project on that scale," said Ms Lennox.



▲ Our youth testing the waters.

My River: engaging the next generation OzGreen



▲ *Connecting our young citizen scientists to lead social change across the whole Murray-Darling Basin.*

Today, the work that began with the My River initiative continues, but the model has been modified.

OzGREEN stepped away from running on-ground water quality testing and citizen science programs in order to develop a more financially sustainable and scalable model.

The focus now is on Youth Leading The World, a program dedicated to training and supporting local people to engage youth to lead social change, and then to assist in connecting leaders throughout the Murray-Darling Basin and around the world.

"The My River model was actually cost intensive in terms of having to have full-time staff out in the field for an extended period of time," Ms Lennox said.

"The support of FRRR and the Pratt Foundation in the early years enabled us to get out in the field and connect with over 50 regional communities – building relationships and establishing a track record."

In the last six years, over 500 facilitators across Australia and globally have been trained - connecting with more than 10,000 young people across 100 regions who are now engaged in river health through scientific and leadership programs.

"The amount of recognition that our partners and the young people who are involved in the program have received makes me understand that what we have built is eminently scalable," Ms Lennox said.

"And that's our focus now, a low cost and scalable model that enables young people to become active citizens, to understand the threats and values of their river basin and to connect these young people across the whole Basin." ■



▲ Engaging the next generation.



▲ Our youth leading social change.



A cross-section of the community planting the first fruit trees in the Phillip Island community orchard. ▲



Chris Tzaros, Birds, Bush and Beyond Photography



Rare species are returning back to their natural habitat. ▲

Phillip Island Community Orchard

Growing the Future:
Island Orchard Cooperative

\$4,470

2013



▲ *The orchard is at the heart of the community.*

Westernport Water partnered with the local Phillip Island community in 2013 to establish an orchard in the town of Wimbledon Heights.

The water authority wanted to demonstrate with the community how recycled water could be used and how to divert its excess water into a productive project.

The community was to provide the labour and the passion and in exchange, Westernport Water offered the land and free irrigation water. All that was missing was initial funding to start planting.

The contribution from the Pratt Foundation effectively got the project started, allowing the community to buy the first fruit trees, prepare the first garden beds and demonstrate in practice how their vision would work.

Geoff Russell from Westernport Water says this early funding was crucial.

"That money was critical, it kick-started the project," he said.

Phillip Island Community Orchard



A labour of love - the local community getting involved. ▲

“When the project started there was a stigma attached to how recycled water could be safely used, but the orchard has helped educate the community that this water is a good resource,” Mr Russell said.

Orchard Treasurer Kate Bennetts said the project continues to evolve as more local groups become involved.

“Some people come very regularly, there’s a local playgroup that has their activities here once a week, and we have monthly working bees,” she said.

“We also have workshops here, so groups of people who may not be members come to learn about the orchard and the water use.”

The project now has a number of donors sustaining it financially and the orchard is expanding.

In addition to growing a local supply of fresh food, the site will continue to be used to promote messages of water security and efficiency, and to share the benefits of recycled water. ■



Large-scale land use change

Heartlands Project:
Goulburn Broken Catchment
Management Authority

\$100,000 2002



▲ An aerial shot of the property 'Killara' before the Heartlands work.

The Heartlands project was a collaboration between the CSIRO and the Murray-Darling Basin Commission to encourage large-scale land use change across four regions in Victoria and New South Wales.



Pratt Foundation funding allowed farmers in the Goulburn Broken Catchment in central Victoria to realise their vision for landscape restoration.

Extensive tree planting transformed overgrazed paddocks to healthy and diverse ecosystems that improved the health of the catchment and attracted rare bird species and other wildlife back to the area.

The Pratt Foundation funding was used to buy seedlings and paid for fencing to keep livestock away from revegetated areas.

Large-scale land use change



▲ *Janice Mentiplay-Smith started planting trees to improve the farm for the next generation.*

Landholders continue to report social and environmental benefits, more than a decade after funding and administration of the program ceased.

Janice Mentiplay-Smith was part of Heartlands in 2002, and planted 12,000 trees on her 200-hectare farm near Violet Town.

“There really wasn’t a lot of life and vegetation here,” she said.

Now Ms Mentiplay-Smith says rare and endangered woodland birds have returned, along with more insect and reptile life.

“We couldn’t have achieved what we’ve done without Heartlands and that sort of support. I can categorically say it just wouldn’t have happened,” she said.

“We would have done some bits and pieces but not to the scale that we’ve done it now. And when you’re talking about nature you need to do things big, you need to really make an impact, so that has worked brilliantly.”

In addition to the project’s legacy of ongoing environmental benefits and landscape change, the plantations are also used

for scientific research.

“Monash University come out and measure the trees for carbon sequestration and that’s fantastic,” Ms Mentiplay-Smith said.

The plantings are also shown to other local landholders as an example of a successful land restoration program.

Ms Mentiplay-Smith’s initial vision to establish wildlife corridors and create a healthy green landscape has evolved and she continues restoration work on her property.

“I’m looking at some of these corridors and they could do with more understory,” she said.

“There are some dams that we’d like to fence off and create more wildlife habitat for things like frogs and reptiles.

“And I want to put in a wetland area because where you’ve got water you’ve got life, so it’s a work in progress, it’s never finished.” ■

McLaren Vale Weather Stations

Monitoring pest and disease and water use forecasting;
McLaren Vale Grape Wine and Tourism Industry Association

\$25,000

2006



▲ *Nine weather stations capture local data every 15 minutes.*

The Pratt Foundation contributed to the development of a wine industry sustainability program that improved farming efficiency and delivered economic and environmental benefits for the community.

The 2006 grant partly funded the installation of nine weather stations around the McLaren Vale area.

The stations were strategically placed to provide current and local climate information that could offer advanced warning of pest and disease threats facing wine grape growers.

The critical information is communicated to grape growers via a regular bulletin called Crop Watch, which encourages more informed farm management decisions. The raw data is also available to grape growers online.

This improved climate information is

McLaren Vale Weather Stations



crucial to the development of successful farm businesses and the prosperity of the local community. Crop yields and quality have improved and instances of costly pest and disease outbreaks have reduced. The reduction in chemical spraying has delivered environmental benefits.

As a former chair of the local Crop Watch group and the manager of a vineyard hosting one of the weather stations, Michael Lane has been assessing the impact of the investment.

“We have a bulletin that goes out on a weekly basis to help growers make informed decisions, and we use that weather station data to make some of the decisions,” he said.

“If there’s a year where downy mildew is prevalent and people are making informed decisions because of the weather stations to apply sprays or not to apply sprays, then there’s cost savings there and yield protection savings.”

Although the stations were initially also intended to assist with water use forecasting, very few growers actually use the information in that way.

Mr Lane says the benefits are primarily disease control and reduced chemical spraying and water efficiency gains are secondary.

“The savvier growers would be using that evapotranspiration data in conjunction with their own soil moisture monitoring to work out irrigation scheduling,” he said.

The data collected has assisted in the creation of the Sustainable Australia Winegrowing program that was developed in McLaren Vale and is now shared with other wine producing regions.

The investment is largely seen by the local industry as a success, although some minor changes could further improve the program.

“With what we know now we might relocate some of the weather stations just to fine tune the spread of the network,” Mr Lane said.

“But the difficulty there is that individual growers paid a small lease to host the station and now are reluctant to agree to having them relocated as the localised information is valuable.”

Escalating maintenance costs are also becoming a minor concern for the industry as the weather stations age. Currently maintenance costs are included in an industry levy charged to all grape growers and it is expected that this model will continue into the foreseeable future. ■



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