

2025

Our Catchments, Our Communities

Spotlight on stewardship support

CASE STUDY



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Mallee CMA Coordinator State Investment Programs
Derrick Boord and Matt Curtis at Boy Creek

For third generation farmer Matt Curtis, putting his hand up for the Mallee Catchment Management Authority (CMA) stewardship program meant he was able to finish an important job that may not have seen completion otherwise.

Matt calls Boy Creek, Wargan, approximately 35kms West of Mildura, his home.

“I’ve been here all my life, I don’t really know anything different, and I couldn’t imagine anything different to be honest,” he said.

It’s perhaps that deep generational tie to the land that makes Matt so passionate about the sustainability and future of Boy Creek.

“Back in 2022, we started planting a variety of Black Box, Mallee and Belah trees on the property – it was looking pretty dry and shabby as a lot of the original Box trees had died,” he said.

“We felt it was important to replace them, to bring it all back to life a bit and regenerate the area.”

But Matt soon found, despite his best efforts, the newly planted trees didn’t stand much of a chance against pest animals and livestock.

“The trees were being eaten by sheep, trampled by kangaroos, all sorts of things,” he said.

“What they needed to be able to survive was protection, but anyone in farming can tell you fencing is an expensive and time-consuming operation.

“It’s important, but not always possible to get done when you also have the day-to-day operations of a farm to think about.”

That’s where the Mallee CMA stewardship program came in, providing Matt with not only the funding to be able to protect and preserve the riparian zone along the creek line, but also the resources needed to make it easy.

Through funding from the Victorian Government, Mallee CMA has four years (2024 - 2028) of funding to deliver the “Our Catchments Our Communities” program.

The funding is used for stewardship agreements between Mallee CMA and private landholders to deliver riparian improvement works along the Murray River and the creek systems within the Millewa.

Landholders eligible for management agreements must adjoin waterways or floodplain areas and be able to demonstrate waterway improvements through funded works. Investment is provided to landholders to deliver activities detailed within the management agreements, including:

- Pest plant and animal control, to reduce grazing pressure on native vegetation;
- Revegetation, recovering denuded landscapes, improving water quality, providing food and habitat for native animals, and reducing wind erosion;
- Exclusion fencing to manage grazing impacts on riparian areas. This will enable native vegetation to regenerate and reduce the threat of wind erosion.

For Matt, it's meant having the ability and resources to fence off a stretch of the creek line on Boy Creek, without being out of pocket either financially or with his time.

"The team at Mallee CMA have made being a part of the stewardship program really easy," he said.

"To be honest, it's not a program I would have put my hand up for ordinarily – a lot of these government programs can be hard bloody work and hard to apply for. Most of them end up being a 50/50 cost split situation, or the farmer has to provide the labour, which takes away time from your farm duties.

"The Mallee CMA stewardship program is different, you're never left out of pocket, you don't have to front up the money and then wait months on end to be reimbursed."

"Mallee CMA take care of everything – from support and advice with contractors down to the paperwork. All I had to do was sign the dotted line, it was made really easy and that was what sealed the deal for me."

Matt said the benefits of the work undertaken at Boy Creek as part of the program were immediately visible, and he now plans to fence off a larger area along the creek line under the program.

"Putting in the fencing has protected this riparian zone, for sure," he said.

"It's given these trees a fighting chance. You can see the damage to the trees planted outside the fence zone – they're literally gone the next day, eaten by the sheep or other animals.

"But the ones that are fenced and protected, they're thriving and will hopefully be here for many years to come.

"It's really rewarding to go for a walk down there and see those little trees growing – it brings in native birdlife and animals, changes the landscape and it makes you feel really good about doing something for the future and sustainability of your land."

A riparian zone is land directly adjacent to a body of water, such as a river, creek, lake, or wetland. It's a transition area between terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems, often characterized by unique plant and animal life.

These zones are crucial for maintaining healthy ecosystems and providing various benefits, including:

- **Habitat and wildlife:** Riparian areas offer diverse habitat for plants and animals, supporting a wide range of species
- **Soil erosion control:** Riparian vegetation stabilizes streambanks and floodplains, preventing erosion.
- **Threats:** Riparian zones are vulnerable to degradation from human activities such as clearing for agriculture, urban development, and changes in water management practices.
- **Restoration:** Restoration efforts can involve planting native vegetation, controlling grazing, and managing water flow to improve the health of riparian areas

This is where the stewardship program supports landholders with riparian zones on their properties with information and government funding to be able to protect and maintain a healthy ecosystem on private land.

Funding acknowledgement

Stewardship with private landholders is supported by the Victorian Government through the Our Catchments, Our Communities program.

