

The Secrets of Good Agency-Community Partnerships: A Review of Stream Repair Programs on WA's South Coast

Basil Schur¹ and Natalie Reeves²

Summary: Salinisation and eutrophication are two mounting problems facing the catchments of WA's South Coast estuaries. This paper reflects on the interactions between a community group (*Green Skills*), landholders, State agencies and waterways management authorities in implementing stream repair projects in the Oyster Harbour, Wilson Inlet, Kent, Frankland and Pallinup catchments. Types of projects include fencing, revegetation, weed management, foreshore survey and broader promotion projects. State agencies can develop effective partnerships with community landcare groups provided they deliver real incentives for farmers to fence and revegetate foreshores of streams and drains, ideally focussing on "hot spots". Key ingredients for success include development of trusting, long term associations between key individuals, delivering effective subsidies free from red-tape for practical riparian works, facilitating easy access into Federal and State programs (Green Corps, NHT, Salinity Action Program etc), and an overall 'pro-active' not 're-active' approach to problem solving.

THE MAIN POINTS OF THIS PAPER

- Stream repair projects need successful relationships between government agencies, community groups and landholders
- On WA's South Coast, these partnerships have resulted in fencing, revegetation, weed management and broader promotion projects
- Agencies need to develop real incentives for landholders to encourage stream repair
- Agencies still have much to learn about how to maximise on-the-ground works.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview of values and challenges

The South Coast region has been described as approximately 5.4 million hectares, incorporating the area from the Frankland-Gordon catchment on the western boundary to Cape Arid on the eastern side (South Coast RAP and SCRIPT, 1996).

Development of the region has mainly occurred over the last 50 years with agriculture being the main industry in the region. The principal forms of agriculture include wool, beef and cereal crop production. However, diversification is leading to the development of additional forms of agriculture including horticulture, silviculture and viticulture. Tourism is a growing industry in the region (South Coast RAP and SCRIPT, 1996).

High conservation values also exist in the region which contains one third of Western Australia's plant species, including many that are endemic. Landscape values include mountain ranges, dramatic coastline and remnant biodiversity.

Development of the fragile environment of the South Coast has resulted in the need for adequate management to address the environmental challenges. It is estimated that up to one million hectares of agriculture land could be subject to dryland salinity within 30 years. Other important issues that have been identified in the region include declining water quality and eutrophication of rivers, estuaries and wetlands. Water and wind erosion

and waterlogging are challenges facing many areas. There is a need to protect remnant vegetation from many impacts. Also, landowners have identified the need for assistance in addressing land and water care issues (South Coast RAP and SCRIPT 1996).

1.2 Project Partners

Green Skills

Green Skills is a non-profit incorporated community organisation dedicated to the creation of employment in the environmental field. It has offices in Denmark, Albany and Fremantle.

Green Skills' three main areas of work include:

- providing environmental training and educational programs to increase skills and raise awareness
- helping people to find meaningful work and fostering the development of ecologically sustainable enterprises
- carrying out practical conservation work in partnership with land managers, private landholders and community groups.

Major projects have made a significant contribution to:

- land and water rehabilitation
- wetlands and biodiversity conservation
- farm forestry programs
- tree planting
- riparian surveys.

Projects are linked to training, assisted by labour market programs, and Green Corps.

¹ Basil Schur, Green Skills, PO Box 577 Denmark WA 6333 Ph (08) 9848 1019 Fax (08) 9848 2061. Mr Schur is also a member of the Wilson Inlet Management Authority

² Water and Rivers Commission, PO Box 525, Albany WA 6330 ph 908 98425760

1.3 Water and Rivers Commission

The Water and Rivers Commission was formed in January 1996 under an act of the Western Australian parliament.

The Commission is responsible for the protection and sustainable management of Western Australia's water resources. The business of the Commission includes:

- investigation of quality, quantity and location of water resources.
- allocation and management for efficient water use
- protection and enhancement of water quality for public, private and environmental uses and values.

The Commission is working closely with government, industry and the community to develop strategies to protect waterways and the surrounding environment and ensure sustainable development for the present and future generations.

1.4 Waterways Management Authorities

Waterways Management Authorities are statutory bodies created under the Waterways Conservation Act 1976, established within a gazetted boundary with membership representing the local community, industry and government agencies. Management Authorities are a part of the Water and Rivers Commission and there are two authorities on the south coast.

The Albany Waterways Management Authority (established in 1991) and the Wilson Inlet Management Authority (created in 1994) encourage and support local action for management of the waterways and their catchment.

AWMA and WIMA support projects such as foreshore surveys; provision of grant assistance for fencing and revegetation; development of demonstration sites; and community watercare projects.

2. FORESHORE SURVEYS

An example of an evolving agency-community group partnership has been in river surveys. In 1992, Dr Luke Pen, then employed as environmental officer with the Waterways Commission representing the Albany Waterways Management Authority (AWMA) voluntarily undertook a foreshore survey of the Kalgan river, near Albany. He used a methodology of grading foreshore quality which has since become widely adapted in South Western WA. With botanical assistance, he also prepared a useful list of revegetation species for different sections of the Kalgan foreshore. This survey was published in 1994 in conjunction with the then Waterways Commission and the Oyster Harbour Catchment Group, an umbrella community landcare group with significant farmer and agency representation.

This survey, and Luke's enthusiasm, inspired a major effort to fence the remaining unprotected foreshores of the main trunk of the Kalgan River. It also resulted in

AWMA funding Green Skills to coordinate two years of foreshore revegetation work. Much experience was gained in working with landholders to revegetate degraded sections along the river. This process was by no means smooth, with an ongoing effort required to build the confidence and support of landholders, and the Kalgan Land Conservation District Committee. Although survival rates were poor on couple of sites because of rabbits, and inadequate weed control, a range of good demonstration foreshore revegetation projects have now been established along the Upper Kalgan river.

Following the success of the Kalgan River survey project, the Wilson Inlet Management Authority contracted Green Skills in 1995 to carry out similar surveys of the Hay and Denmark rivers (Green Skills and Pen, 1995). Working closely with Luke, Green Skills developed the presentation of the survey results to make it more user friendly for land managers. An example of this is attached for the more recent Scotsdale survey.

More recently surveys have been published for the Little River catchment (Green Skills, 1996), foreshores of the Oyster Harbour catchment (Green Skills and Pen, 1997), the Frankland and Gordon Rivers (Green Skills and Pen, 1998), Scotsdale catchment (Green Skills and Pen, 1998) and the Upper Kent (Green Skills and Pen, 1998). Each has been conducted at a different intensity of detail, specific to the needs of the agencies and landcare groups planning foreshore repair works along those rivers.

As the surveys have progressed various lessons have emerged regarding agency-community group partnerships. Agency protocols may lead to delays in the publication process and the distribution of the survey can be delayed. This may cause problems in maintaining the momentum of the community interest following the survey work and it could be more effective for the community group to manage the production of the report. Detailed digitising of remnant vegetation can be very expensive and unnecessary. There are cheaper ways of utilising GIS mapping systems (Geographic Information Systems), where foreshore remnant vegetation mapping is done manually direct from aerial photographs.

The botanical surveys associated with the surveys have been better targeted to providing information of species best suited for revegetation of foreshore areas. Landholder views have been recorded following each contact during the surveys, and this has been collated to provide a valuable record of what each landholder needs in the way of support or advice to commence foreshore protection and rehabilitation work. Photo-monitoring sites have been established in the most recent (Kent) survey (Green Skills and Pen, 1998).

What is most important is the links between these surveys and guiding on ground works. The Oyster

Harbour and Kalgan surveys have allowed agencies and landcare groups to better target fencing and revegetation works. The Hay and Denmark rivers survey also has permitted the Wilson Inlet Management Authority to allocate its fencing subsidies as well as recognise that some of the smaller coastal catchments are key 'hot spots' and need more attention than the main rivers themselves. An example of one project to come out of the Hay survey was a joint project between WIMA, Green Skills, Agriculture WA's Mount Barker Research Station and two landholders to fence and revegetate the entire Hay River frontage of the Mount Barker Research Station.

The Little River report allowed the Denmark Environment Centre to access Natural Heritage Trust Funds to appoint a catchment officer to coordinate riparian repair projects. In addition it is turning agency attention to dealing with some major erosion 'hotspots' along this river. The Kent and Frankland surveys also lead to a much greater allocation of funds for riparian foreshore fencing and rehabilitation in these catchments. Over the past year the Oyster Harbour river surveys have been utilised to prioritise Green Skills' Green Corps work on weed management work. This has focussed on the Lower King river and included pampas, *Acacia longifolia* and Taylorina control along riparian foreshores.

3. PROGRAMS

3.1 Green Skills programs

Green Skills has utilised a number of programs to carry out riparian projects. These include:

- LEEP (Local Environment Action Programs)
- NWO (New Work Opportunities)
- Gordon Reid Foundation Grants projects
- Green Corps

Greater details on these projects are provided in another paper in these proceedings (see Schur, Duxbury and Hopkinson). These have linked directly with the agency programs described below.

3.2 AWMA and WIMA programs

Two examples of programs that management authorities support on WA's South Coast are fencing assistance and community watercare grants

- Riparian Fencing Assistance Grant Program

Both the Albany Waterways and Wilson Inlet management authorities have provided funds to landowners for a number of years to fence waterways under the Riparian Fencing Assistance Grant program. (See Table 1.) Funds are provided based on a one to one contribution between the landowner and authority in line with similar national assistance schemes. In addition, funds have also been provided for stock crossings over waterways, native seedlings and assistance in providing alternative stock watering sites.

Year	Number of projects	Kilometres waterways fenced	Amount contributed \$
94/95	9	19	7600
95/96	12	34	25725
96/97	14	21	19767
97/98	11	17	11000
total	46	91	64092

Table 1: Example of an authority's grants to landholders (Wilson Inlet Management Authority)

- Community Watercare Grant Scheme

The Community Watercare Grant Scheme initiated by AWMA and WIMA is a means of encouraging and assisting community involvement in the protection and enhancement of our waterways. Under the scheme, financial assistance is available for projects that aim to protect or enhance the environmental quality and amenity value of waterways and their foreshore areas.

Through these programs, the management authorities are able to provide funding support to projects developed by individual landowners and community groups. This enables works to be carried out that may have been otherwise financially restricted. Such works assist in addressing land and water care issues and strengthen ties between the agencies and community. These programs also assist in obtaining external funds such as Green Corps or CoastCare projects.

3.3 Water and Rivers Commission programs

The Water and Rivers Commission is involved in many projects that address stream rehabilitation on the South Coast.

These include:

- Development and Implementation of Local River Action Plans;
- Development and promotion of waterways rehabilitation practices;
- Education and training of community groups in rivercare practices; and
- Evaluation of project activities.
- Community monitoring programs

The community concern for the quality of the water in rivers, wetlands and estuaries is reflected the South Coast Regional Initiative (South Coast RAP and SCRIPT, 1996). The community requested that rivers are protected through on-ground works including bank stabilisation, foreshore protection and revegetation. River Action Plans are being developed in partnership with the local communities to plan such on-ground work in a strategic and coordinated manner (Sutton, 1997).

The Commission has also employed local community watercare co-ordinators in Jerramungup, Munglinup, Esperance, Ongerup and Cranbrook to undertake water quality monitoring. The local co-ordinators work will link with the Water and Rivers Commission existing

monitoring program, assist in developing River Action Plans, and provide the community with knowledge necessary to initiate catchment management programs (Blake, 1998).

Some of these projects are jointly funded by the Natural Heritage Trust and the Commission.

Fencing subsidies and the support for native plant seedlings and crossings with reasonably limited amounts paperwork requirements represents the management authorities and the Commissions most effective on-ground partnerships with landholders and groups. Foreshore surveys have assisted in this by linking landholders, priority areas and programs.

Further success has been attained through providing flexibility in being keen to facilitate what the community prefer to implement on the ground, within target areas and providing incentives that are easily accessible.

This success has been evident with south coast agencies which actively cultivate links with community groups and individuals. Initially, key individuals within agencies took the lead in developing these links, and now it is evident that community-agency links are part of the culture of state and local government agencies, particularly this is the case with the management authorities and the Commission.

4. DISCUSSION ON WORKING TOGETHER

Agencies have not traditionally geared towards facilitating local landcare groups and individual farmers in establishing on the ground landcare projects. It requires a high level of facilitation skills, and a knowledge of how to link riparian projects within the constraints of evolving land management practices. Green Skills has aimed to cultivate both the technical and communication skills through running Landcare planning and Biodiversity restoration courses, where participants are exposed to a broad range of agency and farmer contacts, as well as working on useful whole farm planning projects with real landholders.

An ongoing challenge is the need to link surveys directly to grants and support for on-ground works. This link is critical.

Riparian programs depend on ongoing supportive links between agency and community group representatives based on shared values and clear lines of communication.

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Figure 1: Tree and shrub planting on a riparian revegetation project near Denmark, WA. Project partners included Green Skills, the land holder, and the Wilson Inlet Management Authority



Figure 2: A State agency project officer and farmer inspect a salt affected creekline near Mt Barker to be fenced and revegetated as part of the Wilson Inlet waterway fencing program. Photo taken in 1995. Agencies need to deliver on the ground support to win farmers' confidence.



Figure 3: A landholder in the near Denmark beside a fence constructed with financial support provided by a local community group and the shire of Denmark. Successful example of landcare partnerships.