

COMMITTING COMMUNITY TO LOCAL NRM
KYLIE DAM RECOVERY PROJECT – A VALUABLE COMMUNITY
PARTICIPATION MODEL

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Abstract

This paper will look at the outstanding community action taken to rehabilitate a degraded Water Reserve in the Shire of West Arthur. By working with a not-for-profit organization, the local community and a government agency a 40 hectare area that was previously pasture was turned into a commercial native species plantation that is the start of the long rehabilitation process.

Through its participation the community was rewarded with the knowledge that people power works, individuals can work together to achieve positive outcomes, NRM skills were learned and put into practice and interagency interaction can be positive.

This paper will outline the reasons for the project, the planning and participation that was involved, the grant that has been received, the results that have been achieved to date and what is planned for the future.

The water reserve will eventually become a nature reserve vested in the Department of Environment and Conservation. However in the interim 5 years it has been vested in the National Trust of Australia (WA) for its planned rehabilitation. The National Trust works closely with the community to achieve its desired outcomes, outcomes that are shared by the local community.

The reserve itself has the potential to become a significant tourism attraction in the Shire of West Arthur due to the engineering feat in the 1916 which saw the construction of an earth wall dam within the reserve, a 3 kilometre cast iron pipeline to a rail siding over head water tank that remains in place today.

Background

Kylie Dam Reserve comprises 221 hectares and has high conservation significance, with exceptional built and natural heritage values. The reserve was previously vested in the Shire of West Arthur for the purpose of Water Supply, Parkland and Grazing. The reserve includes a railway dam, a three kilometre cast iron pipeline and water tank built in 1916. The built features remain in very good condition and are excellent examples of their type. The dam itself features paved walls, feed channels, silt trap and overflows. The reserve is located north of Bokal East – Arthur Road, approximately mid way between Duranillin and Arthur River, Shire of West Arthur. The reserve retains very good representation of upland native vegetation; however, grazing of the north and eastern portion of the property had degraded the natural values of the site. The reserve sits high in the landscape and is the watershed to the Beaufort Flats.

During late 2005, the Shire of West Arthur determined that the Kylie Dam Reserve should be conserved for the greater community. The decision coincided with the expiry of a grazing lease over the reserve held by an adjoining neighbour.

In February 2006, the Shire wrote to the Department of Conservation and Land management (now Department of Environment and Conservation, DEC) to determine whether the agency would accept vesting of the reserve. DEC responded that they would accept only a portion of the reserve. The Council considered that this would not be the best outcome for the reserve. They considered other avenues and, through Councillor Bill Johnston, approached the Forest Products Commission (FPC). Cr Johnston was advised that, under its Act, FPC could not participate in the proposed transfer. The FPC did however recommend that the Shire contact the National Trust.

The Shire organised a field visit in late February 2006 to discuss issues associated with the reserve. Neighbours and concerned community members joined the meeting. It was made very clear that the future of the reserve should be for conservation.

At the Shire's Council meeting in March 2006, it was moved that Council support the transfer of the reserve to the National Trust on the conditions that access is provided to water from the dam in periods of drought and fire emergency and that rehabilitation be completed and a buffer be provided between the reserve and the buildings on the adjoining property. These conditions were accepted by the National Trust.

The Shire of West Arthur, The National Trust of Australia (WA) and the local community, with the support of the Forest Products Commission, became involved in the restoration project, which, on completion and subject to DEC acceptance, will eventually see the property transferred to DEC for inclusion in the National Reserve System.

Rehabilitation Planning and Design

The National Trust developed a management plan for the reserve in preparation for the extensive rehabilitation works. The plan included identification of areas requiring rehabilitation, selection of endemic plant species appropriate for rehabilitating the reserve, collection of seed, local growing of seedlings and planting in patterns to reflect the natural occurrence of the native vegetation.

A cleared area of some 70 hectares north of the dam had been developed for pasture associated with the previous grazing lease. Consideration was given to appropriate revegetation and criteria for success. The degraded nature of the area lent itself to commercial rehabilitation. The FPC was invited to assist on the basis that native species be established. The FPC's Collie office was very supportive and plans were put in place for a 2008 sandalwood program using native jam (*Acacia* sp.) as host plants.

The disturbed, but not cleared, areas have been reviewed and rehabilitation is planned to incorporate seed and seedlings collected from the site. Plants grown locally will be inter-planted among the remnant trees and shrubs, while the relatively undisturbed areas will receive light controlled fires to stimulate seed germination and growth.



Rehabilitation Approaches – commercial and NRM

The advantage of commercial planting is that, in addition to achieving large areas of rehabilitation quickly, there is an imperative by FPC to ensure that the plants survive. This incorporates regular field visits, spraying for insects and managing grazing by feral and native animals. Failed areas are replanted ensuring that good coverage is achieved. While there is a commercial interest for the FPC, it also provided a means for the agency to interact closely with the community as, under the auspices of the National Trust, the community undertook to carry out the preparation and planting. The FPC also contributes an incentive fee to landowners, in this case the National Trust, for participating in the program and these funds are planned to be reinvested into the reserve.

NRM planting involves a more considered and cautious approach to rehabilitation than commercial planting. Local species need to be identified and arrangements put in place to collect and grow the seed. These processes can take considerable time. Careful design associated with the seeding and planting program among remnant vegetation requires hands on planning and can be labour intensive. Extended time frames are often associated with an NRM approach to planting and, in the case of Kylie and its timeframe for rehabilitation, a combination was required to ensure the program remained on track.

Funds raised – BBG and Lotteries

When the Blackwood Basin Group called for expressions of interest in funding under its Groundworks program, the National Trust lodged an application. The purpose was to rehabilitate the degraded land, lessening the impact of salinity on the Beaufort Flats by reducing recharge. Proposed works included: gathering seed from the western portion for revegetation of the eastern portion of the block; controlling non-indigenous species; reforming existing contour drains to improve harvest of cross-land water flow and lessen

the impact of erosion; and fencing to the north of the revegetation area to protect from stock damage. The project's aim is to restore Kylie Reserve to conservation status, protecting both natural and built environs and engendering community participation and support. Local contractors and, where possible, the local community will be involved in the preparation and planting requirements. The rehabilitation will be maintained by local community members and seedlings will be monitored and replaced as necessary. Pest and weed control will be carried out by qualified contractors on a needs basis.

2. Lotteries

Lotteries has also assisted with Kylie reserve through its grants program for conservation. This project involves the preparation of a conservation plan to assess the built, natural and cultural heritage values of the Kylie Dam Reserve. The conservation plan will inform the development of a larger project to restore Kylie Reserve to conservation status, protecting both natural and built heritage values and engendering community participation and support.

The conservation plan is being prepared by an accredited conservation team, with relevant experience, in accordance with the Heritage Council's brief. The conservation plan will consider the historical, physical, cultural and natural heritage values to provide a holistic representation of this unique site. This holistic approach will be reflected in the conservation and rehabilitation project, in order to ensure that the diverse range of heritage values are conserved and managed appropriately. The conservation plan will identify priorities for the conservation and rehabilitation project. Conservation work is also necessary to maintain the structure of the dam and contour drains. Preparation of the conservation plan will ensure that conservation works proceed in order of priority and are appropriate to the diverse heritage values of the site. The community group will be consulted during the preparation of the conservation plan and will have a direct input into the final product.

3. Kylie Dam Conservation Appeal – Community Contributions

A tax-deductible appeal has been set up by the National Trust for the ongoing management of the reserve. The Appeal is managed by the Conservation of Kylie Reserve Group, who oversees its promotion and expenditure for the conservation and community awareness of the reserve.

The appeal was launched at a recognition ceremony at the Arthur River Sports Club in October 2007.

At the community gathering, a contribution of \$500 was made on behalf of Vincent Serventy, a well known conservationist and a foundation member of the National Trust. The Appeal has also received funds from local community members and these funds will be used for further restoration works on the reserve.

Outcomes from 2007

Commercial planting assisted in having the large degraded areas rehabilitated quickly. In the case of Kylie reserve, this came quicker than expected when the FPC advised that they had sufficient host species to undertake the planting in 2007. Local community leader, Neil Manuel, rallied the troops along with machinery and a midday barbeque to do the preparation and planting. Participants included neighbours, service clubs and school children, as well as community volunteers from the Arthur River area. FPC was on site to oversee preparation and planting standards and safety, as well as maintaining the supply of seedlings. All in all, over 120 participants took part and it became a community activity with very positive outcomes.

Under agreement between the National Trust and FPC, the local groups were contracted to do the preparation and planting works. The community service clubs received much needed funds for their respective organisations and projects and the Arthur River Sporting Club received funds to assist the complete the resurfacing of their tennis courts. The FPC was very pleased with the planting quality and outcomes as well as being able to participate in such a positive community driven project. The National Trust was very pleased to be part of such a positive community outcome. And, the Kylie reserve rehabilitation program had commenced.

As a result of its participation in the community project, the FPC also received a number of positive enquiries about the establishment of sandalwood as future income streams for nearby landowners.

Future program

Commercial Rehabilitation

Excellent growth of the host plants has encouraged the FPC to plant sandalwood seed in 2008 and the community group will undertake the seeding program, under contractual arrangements.

NRM

Seed collection has progressed well. A local nursery has been engaged to grow the seedlings. The community groups will be involved in site preparation and planting.

Facility Development

The completion of the Conservation Plan will provide direction for works on facilities. Wherever possible the community groups will be involved in planning and works through busy bees and fund raising. The Kylie Dam committee will assist in determining priorities.

Community outcomes – participation and achievements

A number of community members have expressed an interest in the reserve and history of the railway water supply scheme and they share a vision to see the site's heritage values documented and restored. Some have been recruited onto the Kylie Dam committee and will be in a position to directly influence the future of the reserve.

The dam, when restored, will also play an important role within the community, as a tourism cultural facility. With the upgrade, or replacement of the pipeline from the dam to the water tank, it will also be used to supply local farmers with water for fire-fighting, or use in times of severe drought.

One of the more significant aspects of the Kylie Dam project has been the willingness of the community to participate. In October 2007, the group was recognised for their outstanding efforts at the launch of the Appeal. This was reported in the local community newspaper and was well received.

In recognising the true country spirit, the Council of the National Trust established a Natural Heritage Volunteer Award in 2007 and it was awarded to the Conservation of Kylie Reserve Group, with Neil Manuel being invited to the National Trust's Annual General Meeting in November 2007 in Perth to receive the award.

On Australia Day 2008, at a local ceremony sponsored by the Shire of West Arthur, the Conservation of Kylie Reserve Group was recognised for their excellent cooperation and community spirit in undertaking the project and for the excellent outcomes that they achieved.

Appreciation

The National Trust wishes to express its appreciation to the following people and organisations for the outstanding support that it has received since undertaking the Kylie Dam project:

Neil Manuel, as community leader, and his band of willing assistants including, but not limited, to Peter Manuel and Scott DeGaris.

Shire of West Arthur – Cr Bill Johnston and CEO Nicole Wasmann

Blackwood Basin Group

South West Catchment Council – for funding the programs

Forest Products Commission, in particular Kim Allen and Greg Hodgson (and Adam Hodgson as our photographic tree planter), from the Collie office.

And National Trust staff Steve Newbey and Laura Colman for their tireless efforts in keeping the project on track.

To find out more about the National Trust's natural heritage programs, please visit our website at www.naturalheritage.org.au or contact us on (08) 9321 6088 or trust@ntwa.com.au.