Linking green corridors across the MIA

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in a nutshell

- The collaborative efforts of individual landholders and community groups at Murrami, in establishing and protecting native vegetation on farms, is building significant linkages into the broader habitat corridors along drainage lines within the MIA and Murrumbidgee Catchment Area.

The vision and hard work of the Murrami LandCare group is starting to pay off. The group, consisting of local landholders, has been actively involved in revegetating significant roadsides and reserves within the area since 1996. These efforts have transformed into significant stands of mature native vegetation now thriving in the landscape.

The revegetated areas now contain habitats for a whole suite of fauna, flora and microorganisms, that provide the eco-services that contribute to catchment health, including agricultural production.

Another important outcome of these efforts, is that the 1996 plantings now form part of major vegetation biolinks in the Murrumbidgee Catchment, and contribute to the broader plan of the Murrumbidgee Catchment Management Authority for sustainable management of the whole catchment.

Local contribution to catchment management

MIA EnviroWise, implemented by Murrumbidgee Irrigation Ltd (MI), is an important component of the broader Murrumbidgee Catchment Management Plan. One of the main objectives of the MIA EnviroWise program, is to protect and enhance the natural resources within the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area (MIA).

Property Vegetation Planning (PVP) is a key element within the program. A PVP is a voluntary agreement between the landholder and the local Catchment Management Authority, which clarifies native vegetation management actions, on farm.

MIA EnviroWise provides incentives to MI customers to promote natural resource management. Landholders with a signed PVP receive incentives to assist with the costs of

Figure 1. Building onto existing green corridors - mature native trees and shrubs planted in 1996 at the Murrami Sport and Recreation Reserve by the Murrami Landcare Group, with funding assistance from MIA EnviroWise.

Figure 2. Robyn Schmetzer, landholder from Murrami, outlines to fencing contractor Glenn Malone of Murrami, a deep ripped site for native tree and shrub plantings that will link into existing native vegetation plantings.

plants, seed, machine planting and fencing materials. Generous incentives are also allocated to enhancing existing native vegetation, due to the higher environmental value of retaining these remnants in the landscape.

The preferred regional outcome in the implementation of these PVPs is to reduce fragmentation and the decline of the natural environment. MIA EnviroWise is building a framework for the natural environment by focusing on planting zones within the MIA with linkages along drainage lines and connecting habitat corridors.

Potential major vegetation biolinks include the north/south links from the Murrumbidgee River to the Cocoparra Ranges and the East/West Riverine biolink along the Murrumbidgee River and drainage link along the Little Mirrool and Mirrool creeks into the Barren Box Swamp and Wetlands.

The Murrami region, part of the Brobenah Ranges, is the local catchment for the Little Mirrool Creek.

On-farm effort, catchment benefit

Murrami landholders, Ian and Robyn Schmetzer, run a mixed farming enterprise, situated within a kilometre of the low open woodlands of the Brobenah range. Active members of the Murrami Landcare Group, they have taken the initiative to build on this existing framework by incorporating green corridors onto their own farm. MIA EnviroWise Vegetation Implementation officer, Cathy Semmler is facilitating their PVP process, starting with the initial consultation and mapping of sites, to organising fencing materials and the supply and planting of seedlings.

The Schmetzers have dedicated large corridors along their boundary lines for revegetating, specifically to connect to existing plantings and roadside remnants of native vegetation. In January 2008, these planting sites were deep ripped to a depth of 600 mm to allow soil moisture to penetrate to the lower substrate. Successful soil preparation assists the seedling to gain quick access for roots into this layer, while thorough weed control prior and post planting, reduces competition.

Fencing materials were supplied through MIA EnviroWise with construction to be completed and the sites ready, for a late autumn/early winter 2008 machine planting. Local native trees and shrubs, consistent with the surrounding boree woodland community, will be planted as seedlings. They will require regular watering for around six months; these indigenous species are fully adapted to the local conditions and will require minimal ongoing maintenance. Tree species will include eucalypts and acacias while the shrub layer includes wattles, saltbushes and bottlebrush. After three years growth the planting sites can be incorporated into the farming system and utilised as strategic grazing sites, for short periods, to reduce weed pressure.

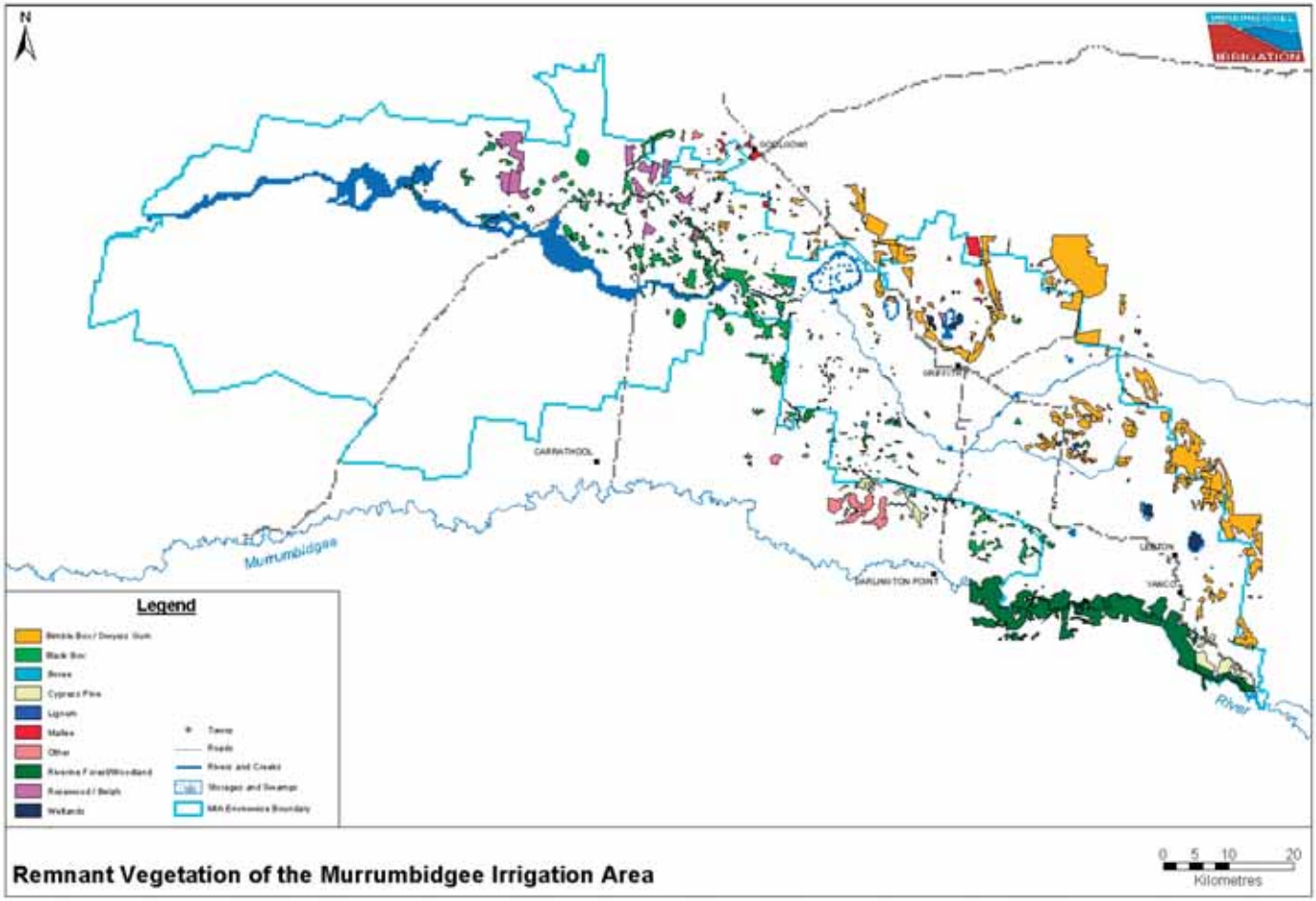

Figure 3. Remnant vegetation within the MIA, mapped in 2002, highlighting the remaining vegetation communities. The focus of MIA EnviroWise is to connect the landscape through revegetation of the north/south biolinks between the river and ranges and the east/west biolink along Little Mirrool and Mirrool creeks to Barren Box Storage and Wetlands.

"The Murrami Landcare group has been working hard for years now on community plantings and on our own farms, so its really great to see the results and how this connects into the 'big picture' of green corridors across the MIA, we are keen to keep on planting!" said Robyn.

Importantly, Ian and Robyn are working in consultation with surrounding landholders to encourage a 'cluster' of plantings on neighbouring farms within this catchment. A collective effort along this important linkage then achieves positive hydrological outcomes along the entire supply and drainage matrix within the MIA.

Further information

Landholders within the MIA interested in establishing native vegetation sites on farm are encouraged to contact MIA EnviroWise on (02) 6962 0200 for advice and assistance.

Figure 4. Existing mature plantings along the Schmetzer's boundary with the Murrumbidgee Irrigation supply channel. Important ecological services supplied by these trees include vital habitat, food resources and shelter for land based fauna. Critically these deep rooted trees have reduced seepage, reduced surface salt and input carbon, for improved soil health.