Improving water quality to benefit wool production

According to a national survey of 1500 wool growers seventy-eight per cent have properties which adjoin at least one waterway. Of those with waterways, 55 per cent have adopted practices to maintain or improve water quality.

Healthy rivers, creeks and streams are the arteries of the Australian environment – they provide the water to sustain many different plant and animal communities and they are the lifeblood of our agricultural enterprises. Without healthy water bodies, Australia does not have a sustainable future.

Managing these water systems is therefore a key component of running a profitable wool producing enterprise.

To identify new productive and profitable solutions to manage natural resources on farm, Australian Wool Innovation Limited and Land & Water Australia have jointly invested in a unique program, Land, Water & Wool (LWW).

A key area of research in the Land, Water & Wool program is River Management and Water Quality. This sub-program will assist wool growers to better manage their rivers and riparian areas and achieve both environmental and productivity goals.

The River Management and Water Quality sub-program will research common riparian management issues for wool growers. Some of these issues include gully and streambank erosion, water quality, weed management and riparian zone management within a total grazing system.

Fencing off waterways and creating wider belts of trees has paid dividends for Mike Grogan on the Southern Tablelands of NSW. As a result of changing management strategies, Mike Grogan (above) successfully maintained wethers stocking rates on native pastures through the 2002/03 drought without supplementary feeding. The wool shorn from wethers grazing on this pasture also attracted 10 per cent price premium over the remainder of the clip for maintaining adequate fibre strength.

Riparian
Any land which adjoins or is directly influenced by a body of water. This includes creeks, billabongs, lakes, wetlands and channels that sometimes flood.
Working with wool growers

Land, Water & Wool River Management and Water Quality sub-program has established project sites in the Midlands of Tasmania, Southern Tablelands of NSW and the Mid North region of SA.

These projects will result in practical methods for improved river and riparian management that wool growers can incorporate into their farming systems. Over the next five years, wool growers, leading researchers, Landcare, local government and community groups will work together to achieve the following objectives for the program:

- an understanding of the issues facing wool growers when managing streams, creeks and riparian lands;
- improved awareness, understanding and knowledge of practical methods for river management and water quality;
- develop practical and cost-effective methods and guidelines for river management that can be used by the wool industry;
- involve wool growers in research and information sharing;
- measure improvement in stream condition and water quality in wool growing regions where demonstration sites have been established; and,
- enable the wool industry to be recognised as a sound environmental manager with best practice methods included in farm management systems.

Research sites for the LWW Rivers and Water Quality sub-program are established in Midlands Tasmania, Southern Tablelands Yass NSW and Mid North, SA.

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Order information on Land, Water & Wool Rivers and Water Quality projects:

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- Preventing erosion to maximise wool production

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Look for other relevant fact sheets on riparian restoration: www.rivers.gov.au

- Managing riparian land
- Streambank stability
- Improving water quality
- Maintaining in-stream life
- Managing stock
- Managing woody debris in rivers
- Inland rivers and floodplains
- Planning for river restoration
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