Identifying opportunities for cross-property landholder collaboration for conservation and production

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“Efforts to increase the scale and effectiveness of social-ecological sustainability can benefit from novel arrangements facilitating holistic integration of environmental conservation across levels of institutions of communities and government...Property and policy, together with ‘place’ attachment of communities can be viewed within a landscape framework.

Such a ‘landscape lens’ provides an interdisciplinary meld that is important to sustainable CBNRM, but sometimes forgotten (or avoided) in government planning, policy deliberation and action.”

(Brunckhorst, 2010: 16)
Why?

• Fragmentation of landscapes
• Ad hoc landscape change – islands of sustainable farming practice, biodiversity and higher landscape function

"Clusters of farmers working together can do more than individuals in helping to deliver greater benefits for soil, water and wildlife on the land under their stewardship"

Dr Dave Parish
http://www.scotsman.com/news/opinion/dr-dave-parish-farmer-clusters-can-support-wildlife-1-4440901

“There is no tragedy of the commons when humans cooperate and play by a few simple rules. Commonly managed resources in tight-knit communities can result in systems that are both efficient and resilient at large scales.”

Peter Allen, Wisconsin farmer
What?
• Working with place-based socio-ecological systems
  • Corridors and linkages
  • Economic resilience
  • Social connectivity

CROSS-PROPERTY
• Clear boundary, clear rights of access to resource units
• Clear group entry and exit protocols
• Self-governed
• Rules of engagement and operation are of local origin and design

(Brunkhorst and Marshall, 2007; Ecker et al., 2015)
What do successful novel arrangements look like?

Pontbren Farmer’s Group, Wales (Welsh Government, 2015)

Valsugana Valley, Italy (De Ros and Mazzola, 2012)

Gracie Creek Landowners, US

https://www.nebraskaprairiechickens.com/

“Regardless of their fondness for conservation, the reality of private lands conservation is expressed in their statement: 'If it pays, it stays'.“ (Powell, 2012: 304)
Our project

• NSW Environmental Trust 2016-2018

• To explore incentives and models for on-ground collaboration on cross-property conservation and production activities.

• Local partners

• Develop an online tool to facilitate local collaboration
Methods:

1. Key informant interviews with facilitators, members or researchers of past/current collaboration examples.
2. Focus groups with existing networks (Watershed, Hovells Creek) to determine opportunities for collaboration.
3. Participatory Rural Appraisals (PRAs) with two communities in the geographical vicinity of 2 focus groups to identify participation preferences.
4. Follow-up workshops with existing networks to plan and develop collaboration around a particular issue.
PRAs

- 55 interviews with private landholders
- 4 interview teams over 3 days
- Local LLS and Landcare facilitators involved as co-interviewers
- Workshops held at the end of each PRA with co-interviewers, invited interviewees and local Landcare reps
- Mix of commercial landholders and non-commercial, small landholders
Current collabs

- Landcare activities – Tree plantings/Zuni bowls and waterway management/Glider boxes/Cat dogger
- K2W corridor plantings, Regent Honeyeater plantings
- Pest and weed control – baiting/aerial spraying
- Fire safety and management with absentees
- Informal arrangements – grazing/inputs/transport/equipment
- Religious communes
“Equipment, anything that you only use once or twice a year, and then just sits in your shed, so thousands of dollars just sitting there ... That was our idea with the spray unit, the tree lopper, the two whackers that we've got now, the pig traps, all those sorts of things, so that everybody in the community, which I suppose is a co-operative in that sense, can actually benefit by utilising the same equipment, instead of everybody either going out and purchasing it individually, or not having the use of it at all, because it's too expensive for your enterprise, because it's not your major income. It's sort of like you like the lifestyle, but ... Which is where we're trying to encourage people to be responsible for managing their properties as well.”

(Interviewee 35, HC)

“When we do stuff, we do stuff thinking what's the landscape?” (Interviewee 30, HC)
Potential collabs

- Strategic corridor coordination, strategic waterway management, strategic pest and weed management
- Cross-property grazing
- Small-scale mobile production (chooks/bees)
- Harvesting pest species (kangaroos/goats)
- Collective marketing/branding
- Ecotourism
  - Glamping
  - Agritourism
  - Wildlife spotting (ie bird-watching)
  - Art trails/Food trails
- Bike and walking tracks through properties
- Cultural tourism on private land
- Rural crime (ie piggers trespassing/releasing baby piglets)
Issues with collabs

• Absentee farmers
• Burn-out

“You need someone to drive that and I don’t have the energy, if I instigated it it would fall on my shoulders” (Interviewee 3, M)

• Land management priorities

“We have differences of viewpoint on this, I like kangaroos, and wallabies, and wildlife, and other people want to shoot them. I say, “You can’t shoot wildlife on my place.” (Interviewee 1, M)

• Neighbour relations

“Unfortunately, we have a bit of an issue with the neighbour across this side, it started off all good...He's a bit of an odd ball. I don't think odd ball is the right word for him actually. He's a bit of a monster.” (Interviewee 14, M)
Issues with collab

• Lack of coordination

“You don't know what other landholders get, the individual grants to map a bigger picture of that connexion...so that sometimes when you're planting things, then it helps creating those corridors as well.” (Interviewee 34, HC)

“You've often got quite a group that's working on something and then you've got someone in the middle who, probably is not interested or that doesn't address theirs and then that's reinfesting everybody.” (Interviewee 4, HC)

“We've got a state forest in one corner and water resources commission down the end. One part's got the big electrical transmission towers, you know? That's a zone of land that no one seems to claim responsibility on. When the wild dogs are travelling they use that corridor, so you just can't deal with it [because] Government are not interested.” (Interviewee 15, M)
Barriers to collab

- Priorities and land ownership trajectory
- Time
- Uncertainty of success

“It's the unknown of putting all the work in...to really believe that all that energy and time and money is going to pay off... it's a real obstacle there because someone has to be driving it but to do that really confidently you've got to really understand and know what you're doing is going to work.” (Interviewee 27, HC)

- Perceived benefit (and time to realise benefit)

“I think probably the informal stuff is kind of where it's more with landholders...I think that's the way it's always been, hasn't it, the people feel much more comfortable. People from the city can be put off with that when they come here but it's kind of the way of the land.” (Interviewee 18, M)
Barriers to collab

• Individualistic mentalities – fear of loss of control
  
  “It's every man for himself in a certain respect” (Interviewee 47, HC)
  
  “And yet chat to [my father-in-law] and he'd say "We don't really want people coming through” (Interviewee 23, M)

• Risk – esp insurance
• Lack of skills and support
  
  “I'd love to approach [my neighbours] and say, "Well why don't we do something that links together?" **There's no facility for me to do that.** If we put together a plan, and I'd like to think that I've got enough experience that I could draw up a plan or do something...” (Interviewee 44, HC)
Conclusions

• Collaboration needs to evolve from a common goal and an informal structure to build trust between neighbours.

• Neighbour groups need a vision – how much do they want to achieve together? What can they learn from other groups?

• The group dynamic is critical and fluid.

• Should collaboration be crystallised or is it meant to be fluid – form organically, disintegrate and reform?

• Should hand-shake agreements and informal arrangements be left untarnished?

• Collaboration is not a panacea and is not appropriate for all farmers, but there should be more support for those who want to unite.
Next Steps

The online tool for local communication – see poster!

Website: https://landholdercollab.org/
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/landholdercollab/
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