

2019

## GLENELG CASE STUDY SOCIAL REPORT

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### Risk and Reward

The original allotment that was Glenelg consisted of densely wooded vegetation, minimal grass cover, significant erosion scalds and lots of weeds. Not an ideal start to a grazing enterprise, however, where one sees a challenge, another sees an opportunity. If this landscape was to be returned to health it had to be productive, profitable and more in keeping with its pre-European vegetation structure.

When Harry Chambers purchased this property in 1970 much of the landscape looked similar to neighbouring properties today. It's a remarkable story of resilience, determination and landscape interpretation. Soils for Life is proud to reflect on pioneers of generations past and their contribution to Australian agriculture, Harry Chambers and his innovative yet risky approach to landscape management could well be another chapter in the Australian story. Whilst Harry may have passed the enterprise onto Graham and Jan Chambers his legacy and the ongoing developments appear set to serve the test of time, come rain, hail or drought.

### The Vision

The original landscape around Mungallala was lightly timbered open country, with deep watering holes and springs renewed by underground aquifers. Flora and fauna was more abundant and of greater diversity. Erosion was not a concern because ground cover was bountiful, binding the soil and capturing water in the landscape. In order to return this land to a functioning landscape, tree density had to change. But it wasn't without risk. Removal of trees is known to raise water tables and leave salt scalds on the landscape.

Tree removal commenced not long after purchasing Glenelg, initially by ringbarking, then followed tree pulling, chemical application (Tordon), blade ploughing and finally stickraking. Gradually as the trees were pulled, Buffel grass took hold and the land started to repair itself. Ground cover improved out competing weeds like Galvanised burr (*Sclerolaene birchii*), Bathurst Burr (*Xanthium spinosum*) and *Pimelea* sp.

As grass and ground cover species took hold biodiversity increased. Now there was habitat and protection for ground dwelling species, water was being captured where it fell, deep rooted perennials were accessing the water table and life was returning. The water table had risen and Glenelg had permanent watering holes not seen on neighbouring properties for years.

The response was positive, landscape function was returning with the water cycle and vegetation responding to the changes. Productivity increased, stock had access to clean drinking water, the enterprise was independent and resilient.

One thing leads to another and with this came kangaroos. The conservative stocking regime encouraged roos to graze and compete with livestock for pasture. It seemed Glenelg was a beacon of light for all sorts of species! In 2014 an exclusion / predator fence was commenced, over the course of the next two years the Chambers constructed the fence themselves minimising costs as they go. Once the fence was sealed a program of kangaroo culling saw improvements in total grazing pressure. Wild dogs inside the fence were trapped. There was a noticeable response from livestock, a general calmness descended upon the herd, not to mention the landholders!

A can do attitude has served the Chambers well, by taking control of their circumstances through construction of the exclusion / predator fence, contracting shearers', undertaking their own mechanical repairs and attention to woody regrowth, Glenelg is now a low input, debt free, productive enterprise.



## Water Holes

Glenelg has a functioning hydrological system, good ground cover capture’s water where it falls, springs have started flowing again, deep rooted perennials access the water table, water holes are permanent and the biodiversity that lives in and around these watering holes has returned.

Native fish abound, Blue claw yabbies, Swans, Jabiru’s, frogs, reptiles and mammals are all attracted by the permanent water supply. As too are the locals to catch a feed of fish or yabbies and relax in this idyllic of past times. Interestingly the introduced Carp species are less frequent at Glenelg than elsewhere in the district. Possibly because the ecosystem has been restored and the natural balance that exists keeps all species in check.



## Community

When a landscape is resilient not only does the outlook appear more positive and the livestock more content but the land manager has more time, enabling a balanced lifestyle. A nice mix between working on the land, working with your hands and your mind to working with and for others. No better example of that than Jan Chambers, Deputy Mayor Maranoa regional council. In this role Jan not only represents constituents in relation to roads, rates and rubbish but chair’s the Finance sub-committee, as well as numerous other sub committee’s including Community Engagement and Major Projects. Furthermore, Jan is Secretary to the Maranoa Diggers’ Race club. Clearly a busy person, her

unrelenting drive to represent the local community, to advocate and provide for the Maranoa region all whilst co-managing an enterprise that has endured an extended drought lasting six years to date.

## The Future

The regrowth maintenance program, conservative stocking regime and strong family support will see the stewardship of this land and the property it supports carry on into the foreseeable future. Both Jan and Graham are active, healthy people leading full lives. They get plenty of physical exercise and balance their extensive commitments to the farm and community through hard work, planning and dedication. Sons Sidney and Matthew are actively involved with Glenelg and it’s likely that one of them will take it on when the time is right.

The Chambers approach to regenerative agriculture hasn’t been conventional, but an unconventional approach isn’t necessarily bad. To swim against the tide takes courage and the results can be most rewarding. We’ll leave the final words to the Chambers “...most satisfying, treating country right and leaving it for the next generation” and to see the quality of the wool provides them with a sense of job well done.