

MEDIA RELEASE

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“Our land is more than just a bit of dirt”

In July 2005, the Queensland Murray-Darling Committee Inc. (QMDC) ran a pilot project – the Bush Tender – to trial a new way of increasing awareness and actions to conserve the region’s native vegetation. The Urquhart family, of Moonie, were one of several landholders who successfully applied for the funding scheme.

The Urquharts property, ‘Warrowa’, is situated directly opposite Southwood National Park in the southern Brigalow belt. Recognising the importance of linking vegetation across the landscape, the Urquharts have established a 50 hectare nature reserve on ‘Warrowa’. The nature reserve, dominated by remnant Brigalow, creates a wildlife corridor and enhances the sustainability of the property.

“We think conservation is essential to what we do,” says Lynelle Urquhart. But, implementing conservation work and making ends meet at the same time is not always easy. Like many farmers, the Urquharts fully understand the value of protecting natural resources. “We are here for the long term and know that by managing sustainably we will keep our resources in good shape,” says Warren. “But it seems to be getting financially harder to do that.”

In July 2005, QMDC did something that no Queensland natural resource management body had attempted before: they put government funds, allocated to improve vegetation conservation, out to tender.

In its most simplistic form, a tender of this nature asks landholders to compete for funding, demonstrating how they will best achieve the outcomes the tender requires. Basically, these tenders allow communities to buy (through tax dollars) increased biodiversity, and many other natural resource outcomes from landholders.

This scheme allows landholders to set the price for what it will cost **them** to achieve these outcomes. Rather than shouldering the full cost of maintaining native vegetation, landholders are able to access funding to help them achieve their own goals, as well as the goals of broader catchment areas. The Bush Tender also provides landholders with the information, training, and technical and financial support needed to undertake large-scale conservation activities. The long-term result of this is better on-farm management, improving the quality of catchment health and benefiting whole communities.

QMDC’s pilot tender was run between July and September 2005, in an area where remnant vegetation coverage outside public lands was extremely low, less than 10%. “So, the target area was a high priority for the catchment, and helping landholders to protect and enhance what did exist was a high priority for QMDC,” says QMDC’s Regional Coordinator for Vegetation, Lyn Pullen.

The Urquharts were quick to apply for the pilot, seeing it as an opportunity to achieve some of their own conservation goals. “It’s an opportunity [for communities] to give something back to those farmers who have done the right thing and, subsequently, forsaken the income that land could otherwise have provided,” says Lynelle.

The Urquhart’s application was accepted in September 2005 and, as a result, the Urquharts intend to sustainably manage their grazing by replacing some of the farm’s original fences that are no longer effective. It is hoped that, with new fences in place, the Brigalow shadelines that act as important wildlife corridors will stay healthy for years to come. “These corridors and shadelines connect bigger patches of remnant vegetation together and are also good windbreaks for stock and grazing areas,” Lynelle said.

By replacing these fences, the Urquhart family will also be able to control the impact of stock and feral animals on the vegetation, manage the area for weeds, and encourage the growth of native species, enhancing the overall biodiversity value of their property.

Involvement in QMDC's Bush Tenders is totally voluntary and, according to Lynelle and Warren Urquhart, totally worthwhile. "Conservation is something we've just got to do; like the ironing!" says Lynelle. "Our farm isn't just a bit of dirt, it's part of a whole ecosystem – and it's got to last not just for us, but for future generations also."

QMDC will run its Bush Tender annually. For more information, go to the QMDC website, or contact the office on 07 4637 6201.

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Captions:

Photo 1 - The Urquhart family believe their property is more than "just a bit of dirt". It needs to be protected for future generations.

Photo 2 - A Bearded Dragon, one of the many species currently found on 'Warrowa'.

Photo 3 - Sunset over a "Warrowa" water hole: a heritage worth protecting

All photos are courtesy of Lynelle Urquhart.