



## Wheatbelt forums chance to influence environment



Left to right: Ernie Dingo, Dr Christine Jones, Peter Cooke, Rowan Reid and Todd Hutchinson will be presenting at each Community Forum

**The group which manages the natural resources of more than 12 million hectares in the WA Wheatbelt is looking for your input.**

Wheatbelt NRM has undergone a name change (formerly the Avon Catchment Council) and a restructure, so it can work more closely with the community.

Three open forums have now been organised for April in Wongan Hills, Merredin and Hyden, giving people the opportunity to influence what the future plans are for Wheatbelt NRM.

"We also need to hear what you expect from a group that has a budget of millions of dollars and can influence natural resource management in the region," the group's chair Glenice Batchelor said.

"We're talking about issues as diverse as supporting sustainable agriculture to developing new business opportunities for carbon trading.

"Of course we want to continue to improve biodiversity, soil and water quality, reduce wind erosion, salinity and soil acidity, topics which are relevant to so many people living in the Wheatbelt.

"These are just some of the things we are going to focus on over the next couple of years and we want to know what you think of them and any opportunities for partnerships and collaboration."

The forums are being hosted by Wheatbelt NRM Sub-catchment Directors and will be presented by the world renown actor and entertainer Ernie Dingo. This will enable people to meet their new local sub-catchment directors Sue Middleton, Ian Hall and Marilyn Temby.

East Brookton farmer Ian Hall is also chairman of Avongro Wheatbelt Tree Cropping, a group that advises land managers how to set up commercial tree crops on farming land.

"Agroforestry expert Rowan Reid is one of the speakers at the forums," Ian Hall said.

"The take home message from Rowan is how you can incorporate private forestry into your traditional farming enterprise.

"Commercial tree cropping is traditionally a 650 millimetres rainfall, but we're proving we can do it at less than 450 millimetres".

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# Wheatbelt forums chance to influence environment

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"We're talking about using country that regularly gets frosted, is salty or sandy, that you can't earn money from when it comes to cropping or livestock.

"If you're interested in creating a wider range of income through agroforestry, then this is an opportunity to hear first hand that it is possible in the Wheatbelt."

Sue Middleton helps to manage her husband's family farming operation which includes a cropping and pork production enterprise and an orchard, in locations as diverse as Wongan Hills, Yerecoin, Moora, Muresk and Kojonup.

She is currently investigating the use of methane gas to produce electricity in the piggery industry and is keen to find out how she can integrate natural resource management to make the business more profitable.

"I'm also interested to hear more from controversial soil scientist Christine Jones. She's one of the speakers who will talk about soil health, an important issue for the Wheatbelt.

"We have fragile soils which we're constantly expecting to produce high yielding crops on low rainfall, so it will be interesting to hear what she has to say about this."

Peter Cooke of Agknowledge will also present at the forums with the community workshops facilitated by Todd Hutchinson from the People Rich Group of Companies.

Considered a dynamic speaker, Todd Hutchinson has been recognised as one of the State's pre-eminent business leaders under the age of 40 by WA Business News.

For more information on attending the forums please contact Liz Kington on 9690 2296.

Speaker Bios are featured on page 10.

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## Nyungar Seasons

### Birak

#### December - January

Hot and dry with easterly winds during the day and south west sea breezes in the late afternoon from December to January.

### Bunaroo

#### February - March

Hot easterly and north winds from February to March





# From the Chair



Glenice Batchelor

Hello Everyone,

It seems a long time since our last newsletter with a lot of happenings in between. I hope everyone enjoyed a wonderful festive season and took the time to have a relaxing break ready for the challenges of a new year!

It's also a good time of the year to reflect on the year that was - or at least the last few months of it. In October at our first AGM as Wheatbelt NRM we highlighted the achievements and challenges of a year of change. Our new group members cast their first votes and we welcomed three new directors: Peter Weatherly and Wendy Dymond and Avon Sub-catchment director, Sue Middleton. We thanked and farewelled those leaving through retirement – Brian English – and those finishing due to organisational re-structure; our state and local govt agency representatives.

The NRM/Landcare State conference was held in Geraldton and hosted by NACC. We listened to inspirational speakers and enjoyed the company of like-minded people and colleagues.

The State Landcare Awards Dinner saw Wheatbelt NRM presented with the Best Regional Group Award – a great honour that encourages us to continue to do better. By lucky co-incidence we had three previous Chairs in attendance representing their local community groups- Mike McFarlane, Wayne Clarke and Merrilyn Temby. It was great to share the acknowledgement and showed that even when you think you've done enough- there is always more to do at a local level in your own backyard (or waterway or paddock!).

Wheatbelt NRM will now represent WA at the National awards.

The National Landcare conference is to be held in Adelaide and we are sponsoring community attendance.

Our region further showed its commitment to the environment and community with other award winners – Linda Vernon winning the WA Young Landcare Leader Award and the Toodyay Friends of the River won the Department of Water River Rats Living Streams Award. (Our thoughts have been with those affected by the Toodyay fires).

Wheatbelt NRM were finalists in the Department of Indigenous Affairs Indigenous Service Award. This recognised the great collaborative efforts of our staff Di Lovell, Liz Kington and Nathan Heal and the local Elders whose support is highly valued.

At the state level, the six regional chairs have been busy working on a new structure "The Way Forward" to better collaborate and represent our communities from across WA. This year the State Government committed \$30 million to NRM projects, allocating these funds through government agencies. By working together we hope to gain access to funding for our regional communities in the next budget and have given Minister Terry Redman a range of priority projects from across our regions. We've developed what we believe is a better process for future budgets and are waiting to hear the outcome. We've provided a number of excellent information booklets for our region as part of the completion of projects including: 'Aquatic invertebrates and waterbirds of wetlands in the Avon region', 'Nutrient management for the Avon River Basin' and 'Mammals of the Avon Region' launched in Quairading by Minister for the Environment: The Honourable Donna Faragher. The most recent, 'Soil Acidity: a guide for WA farmers' provided the opportunity to meet the new Director General of the Department of Agriculture and Food WA Rob Delane and lunch with our project partners at DAFWA in Northam.

The new Caring for our Country business plan has been released and we will be working to provide more funding for our communities in line with our recently completed Strategic Plan 2010 - . We're looking forward to a new year of achievements and intend to show leadership, working with an active Avon River Basin community, managing natural resources in a healthy environment.

Glenice Batchelor  
Chairperson

# Moving forward in 2010



## Peter Sullivan Wheatbelt NRM CEO


*"Our focus for 2010, is to work closely with landholders, farming groups, local councils and communities to find out what needs to be done in the Wheatbelt when it comes to natural resource*

Wheatbelt NRM is an independent community based group helping to preserve and conserve the environment and the communities that exist in it.

The 2010 projects will be based around helping to protect bushland on private land, sustainable agriculture based on reducing wind erosion and working with the Aboriginal community. Projects are being funded through the Commonwealth Government's Caring for our Country program and

are worth more than \$4 million. Wheatbelt NRM has found that working with communities and farming groups within the region is the most effective way to help with the management of natural resources.

To get an idea of what Wheatbelt communities want, three open forums have been scheduled for April in Wongan Hills, Merredin and Hyden.



## Dan Ferguson Soil Conservation Incentives Program

*"Wheatbelt farmers have long recognised the threat posed by wind eroding fertile top soil, which contains precious organic matter, nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium."*

Wind erosion in action, photo courtesy Monica Durcan

The Soil Conservation Incentives Program offers farmers or farming groups grants of between \$5000 and \$50,000.

To be eligible for a grant, landholders must trial or demonstrate farm management practices that protect the soil from wind erosion.

The three main categories are; Integrating tree crops into farm systems, recommended grazing management practices and recommended

cropping management practices. The scheme will run until 2013 and is worth \$4.4 million, funded through the Commonwealth government's Caring for our Country program.

Round Two of the Soil Conservation Incentives Program recently closed on Monday, 15th March 2010.



# Moving forward in 2010



View from Yeregin rock (Courtesy Di Lovell)

**Liz Kingston**  
**Sustainable Communities**  
*"We want Wheatbelt NRM to become involved in Aboriginal culture because we value the traditional ecological knowledge they have."*

Wheatbelt NRM will continue to protect culturally significant sites, consulting with community in the region. This includes the recording of Elders stories and their recollections of how the landscape used to look, using filmed interviews to be share knowledge amongst schools and community groups.

Varying with each site, the protection work could include cleaning up, re-vegetation, improving water quality and interpretive signage with Nyungar language that explains more about the area.

Last year, similar work was completed at Burlong Pool in Northam, the Badgaling Aboriginal Community north of Quairading and Mount Kokerbin situated in the Bruce Rock Shire.

The Wheatbelt NRM Aboriginal Advisory Group, which is made up of Elders from each sub-catchment play an important role in site identification and Aboriginal issue relating to NRM.

## Community Engagement Program

"By talking to and working with the community, we are trying to improve the landscape and the environment they live in." said Liz Kingston, Program Manager - Sustainable Communities.

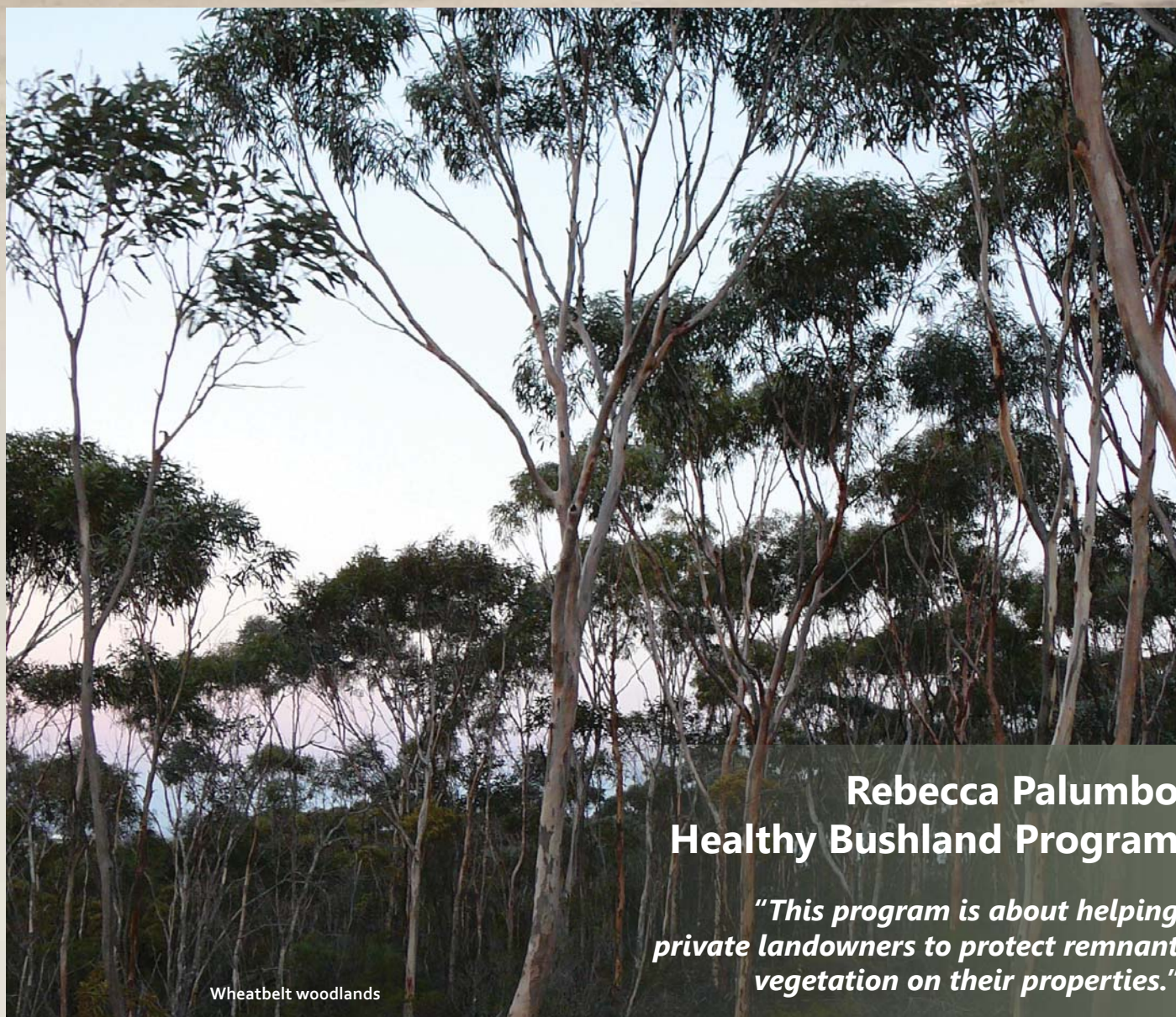
Wheatbelt NRM is encouraging groups to apply for grants of between \$5000 and \$15000 for natural resource management projects in the community.

The projects can be varied, but Wheatbelt NRM looks for activities that will increase community engagement, knowledge and skills in natural resource management. Managing this project is Carla Swift who can be contacted on 9690 2257 for more information.

For example last year, the Meckering Primary School received funding for its "Crunch and Sip" garden which taught students about water use, sustainability and healthy lifestyles.



# Moving forward in 2010



Wheatbelt woodlands

## Rebecca Palumbo Healthy Bushland Program

*"This program is about helping private landowners to protect remnant vegetation on their properties."*

The program is funded through the Commonwealth Government's Caring for Our Country National Reserve System program to the tune of \$2 million over the next four years.

The idea behind the Healthy Bushland Program is to help protect iconic Wheatbelt vegetation such as Salmon gum, York gum and other woodlands.

This help could be in the form of funding for fencing to keep stock out, weed control or revegetation. Wheatbelt NRM is encouraging landholders to explore the idea of a voluntary conservation

covenant. This involves the landholder committing to protect and manage their bushland forever.

Help can be provided to assist the landholder to look after the bush, this could be in the form of funding for fencing to keep stock out, weed control or revegetation.

Over the last four years 15 landholders in the Wheatbelt agreed to a conservation covenant, helping to protect 1500 hectares of bushland.



# Get to know your Healthy Bushlands Officer

## Mike Griffiths Project Officer Healthy Bushland WWF



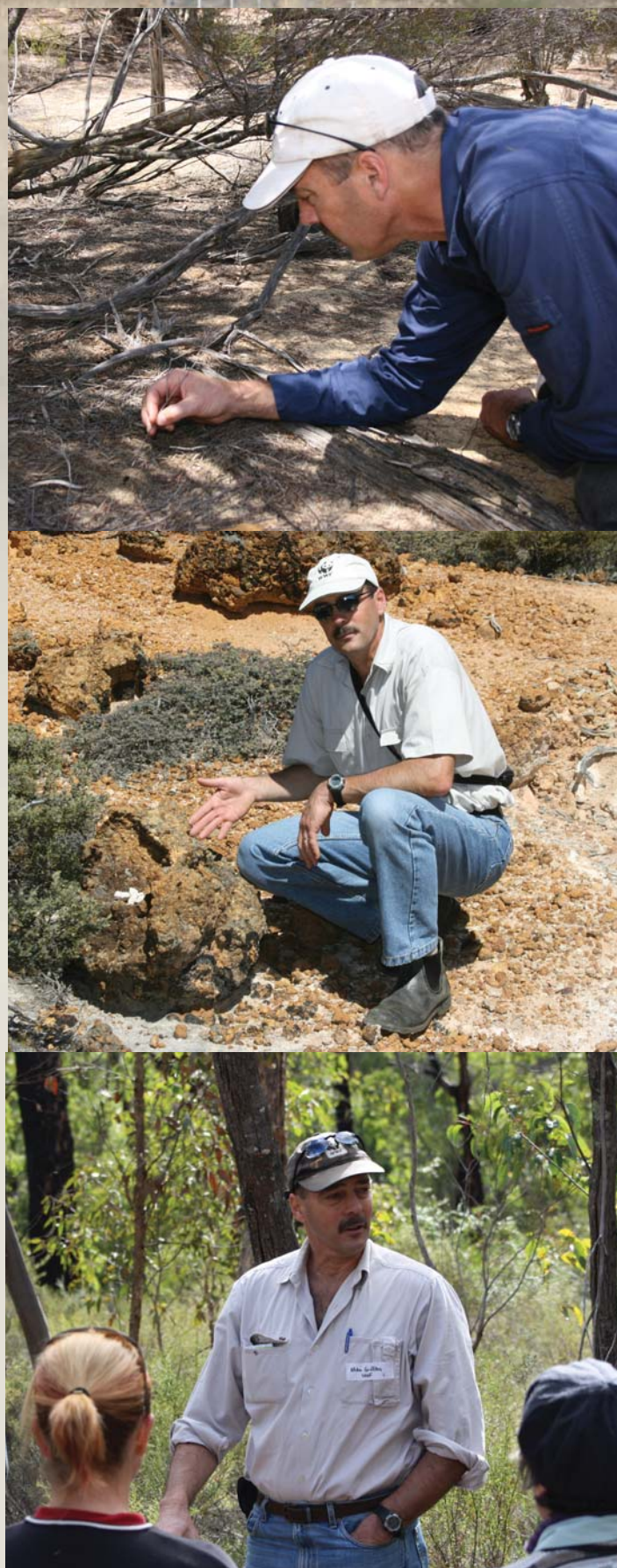
Mike is a modest fellow who gets a kick out of his job because he loves working with plants, wildlife and real people but mostly because he reckons when he works with private landholders in the wheatbelt he can actually see he is making a difference.

Talk to his workmates and they will add another detail to that story, describing him as a walking encyclopaedia of Australia's natural world. And his WA networks are second to none. People say, 'There's hardly anyone you meet around the traps who doesn't know or hasn't heard of Mike Griffiths!'

That should come as no surprise because he studied biology at Curtin University and then went on to a career in eco tourism and environmental consulting travelling the length and breadth of WA. When not practising karate, listening to his favourite bands or brushing up on Aboriginal languages, Mike is out there with the rest of the Healthy Bushland team building trusted relationships with landholders keen to manage their farm's bushland areas for generations to come.

Adding flavour to any conversation about a remnant patch of bushland is the one around camera traps. Mike has become a local expert (in collaboration with WWF colleague Phil) and has already captured incredible photos of elusive native animals with these amazing critter cams. "Don't worry," he says, "I'm not obsessed about camera trapping, I'm just focused!"

Mike can be contacted on 9690 2232 or email [mgriffiths@wwf.org.au](mailto:mgriffiths@wwf.org.au)



Left (Top to bottom): Mike Griffiths in action



# Survey turns up undescribed species in Wheatbelt reserve

David Knowles with specimen of Blind Snake at Gwambygine Reserve



**A survey of small fauna near the Wheatbelt town of York has led to the discovery of several undescribed species of insects and spiders.**

The Gwambygine Pool Conservation Reserve is home to one of the last remaining permanent deep water pools along the Avon river.

Through funding from Wheatbelt NRM, zoologist David Knowles has sampled and photographed more than 400 insects, spiders, centipedes, millipedes and slaters.

"This is an area rich in biodiversity and a significant proportion of these smaller species will be undescribed or new to science," David Knowles said.

"Invertebrates play a crucial ecological role as major pollinators, sap suckers, leaf pruners, recyclers, predators and prey.

"The Gwambygine pool exists in an environment quickly going to salt, so we're seeing fauna being forced to migrate west from the inland Wheatbelt, to where fresh water exists."

The local community through the York River Conservation Society made the survey possible after applying for funding through Wheatbelt NRM.

The group has been working since 1990 to repair the river, including re-vegetating banks, removal of silt and re-establishing the islands in the shallow stretches of the stream.

David Knowles said while he was confident new species existed at the Gwambygine Pool Conservation Reserve, the difficulty would be naming and identifying them.

"These animals will now have to wait in a museum queue for identification, which requires considerable time and money," David Knowles said.

"What is important to know is that this is the only major invertebrate survey, supported by pictures of recorded species, ever done in Western Australia.

"It has revealed a wealth of species reliant on mature stands of riverside vegetation, despite the understorey being dominated by weeds."

Wheatbelt NRM has funded the survey to increase community awareness of insects and their role in the environment.

The results from David Knowles stock take will be finalised in May, and will be available on the Wheatbelt NRM website; [www.wheatbeltnrm.org.au](http://www.wheatbeltnrm.org.au)



# Bolgart farmer helping tackle wind and water erosion

Broadacre farmer Trevor Syme with Wheatbelt NRM Sustainable Agriculture Program Manager Dan Ferguson



**Broadacre farmer Trevor Syme is one of 12 Wheatbelt landholders helping to tackle wind and water erosion by improving the soil on his Bolgart farm.**

He has successfully applied for a grant of \$31,000 through Wheatbelt NRM to trial the use of clay on white sandy soils.

"We want to find the optimum amount of clay and the best way to mix it into paddocks, to help stop wind erosion and improve crop yields," Trevor Syme said.

Non-wetting white sandy soils affect about two million hectares of land in the South West of WA.

"Spreading clay can cost upwards of \$750 a hectare, but we've already seen an increase in wheat yields by more than one tonne to the hectare."

"The clay is sourced from on-farm and helps to improve the structure of the white sandy soil and its ability to hold water."

Other landholders in the Wheatbelt are also being encouraged to follow Mr Syme's lead and apply for grants under the Soil Conservation Incentives Program.

The first round of the project in January resulted in \$345,000 spent on tackling wind erosion in the Wheatbelt.

Wheatbelt NRM's Dan Ferguson said landholders can start planning for round three of the program.

"Landholders can apply for grants of between \$5000 and \$50,000 to trial or demonstrate farm practices that protect the soil from wind erosion," Dan Ferguson said.

"This is not a new issue for Wheatbelt farmers, who have long recognised the damage eroding fertile top soil can have."

Projects can include integrating tree cropping into farming systems, and demonstrating or trialling cropping and grazing management practices that control wind erosion.

Funding for the project is through the Australian Government's Caring for our Country program.

Please contact Wheatbelt NRM for more information.



# Community Forum Speakers Profiles

## Dr Christine Jones



Dr Christine Jones is an internationally renowned and highly respected groundcover and soils ecologist.

Christine has a wealth of experience working with innovative landholders to implement regenerative land management techniques that enhance biodiversity, increase biological activity, sequester carbon, activate soil nutrient cycles, restore water balance, improve productivity and create new topsoil.

Christine has organised and participated in workshops, field days, seminars and conferences throughout Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Zimbabwe and the USA and has a strong publication and presentation record.

Christine received a Community Fellowship Award from Land and Water Australia in 2001. The LWA Community Fellowship Program provides recognition to individuals with an outstanding track record in mobilising and inspiring the community to better manage their land, water and vegetation.

## Rowan Reid



In 1985, at the age of just 24, Rowan co-authored the book *Agroforestry in Australia and New Zealand*.

He has since been a leader in the development of agroforestry education and extension programs in Australia having developed the first undergraduate course in agroforestry in Australia and the very successful Australian Master TreeGrower Program. Rowan was awarded the 2000 Eureka Prize in Environmental Education for his work on the program.

Rowan also practises agroforestry on his own farm. Bambra Agroforestry Farm provides the opportunity for landowners to see a wide range of tree species grown for timber, fodder, food and seed production as well as the opportunity for practical outdoor education.

His research includes work on eucalypt plantation silviculture, buffer strips management, extension methods and landscape change. He has been the principal researcher on competitive R&D grants totalling more than one dollars and has published in peer reviewed journals and research reports.

After more than 20 years as an academic at the University of Melbourne, Rowan is now working privately on his own farm and as a consultant.



# Community Forum Speakers Profiles

**Peter Cooke**



Peter Cooke has a varied and extensive background in agriculture, agribusiness, business development, project management, marketing, strategic planning and communications.

As a Muresk graduate Peter farmed in the Pingelly area during the '80's before a change of career to CEO of the Kondinin Group and over the next decade was responsible for significant growth of the Farm Improvement Group from local to national, and became the trend-setter for the modern groups of today.

In 1998 Peter, with his wife Nicol Taylor, established Agknowledge a firm specialising in strategic development for agribusiness, farmer based organisations and farm operations to consider and plan their future - their intellectual capital.

Peter was Chair of the FarmBis program from 1998 to 2008, chaired the Department of Agriculture's New Industries program and was a member of the Supermarket to Asia group for Research Technology and Innovation for the previous federal government. Peter has held a range of boardroom positions and is currently Deputy Chairman of Landgate, a Non-Executive Director of Landcorp and in his spare time is Chairman of the Selectors for Australia's Olympic Showjumping team.

**Todd Hutchinson**



Dynamic and inspirational international professional speaker, author, consultant and known as the "Corporate Mechanic™".

Todd Hutchison has been recognised as one of Western Australia's pre-eminent business leaders under the age of forty by WA Business News and the 2008 Rising Star by the National Speakers Association of Australia.

Todd has significant executive leadership experience as Managing Director and Chairman of the People Rich group of Companies and, amongst other roles, Chairs the of the Wheatbelt NNRM Nominations Committee and is the Acting Executive Officer of the Natural Resource Management Regional Leaders Group, and Managing Director and Chairman of the People Rich Group of Companies amongst other roles.

Todd will facilitate the community feedback workshop at the Forums, and his expertise and enthusiastic personality will ensure Wheatbelt NRM proficiently attends to communities NRM issues with clarity.



# CfoC MERI Plans

**Monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement (or MERI) are essential components of all Wheatbelt NRM programs.**

Each of Wheatbelt NRM four Caring for Our Country programs has a MERI Plan setting out key evaluation questions, measures, methodologies, roles, responsibilities and timeframes. These plans are available on the Wheatbelt NRM website at <http://www.wheatbeltnrm.org.au/monitoringandevaluation>

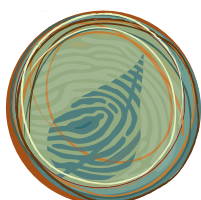
The inclusion of planned monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement activities in our programs has a number of benefits, including:

- to increase the knowledge and understanding of people participating in the project
- to allow project managers to judge whether a project is/has been successful and whether any changes should be made during the project or for future projects
- to provide information about the successes or lessons learned for planning new improved projects, as part of a continuous cycle of improvement
- to promote the project and it's outcomes to the community and other key stakeholders
- to demonstrate the success of a project to funders for accountability
- to collect information that will contribute to the body of knowledge about managing the natural resource assets of the Avon region

For more information contact Michelle Kidman, Monitoring and Evaluation Coordinator on 9690 2250 or via email at [mkidman@wheatbeltnrm.org.au](mailto:mkidman@wheatbeltnrm.org.au)

## **Need Help with monitoring, evaluation, reporting or improvement?**

Then contact Wheatbelt NRMs Monitoring and Evaluation Coordinator, Michelle Kidman. Michelle is available to provide advice and assistance to the community and can be contacted on 9690 2250 or via email at [mkidman@wheatbeltnrm.org.au](mailto:mkidman@wheatbeltnrm.org.au)



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