

Introduction to the Natural Sequence Farming Workshop

- by Pam Green*

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As Chair of Southern Rivers Catchment Management Authority I am very pleased to have been able to play a small part in helping organise the Natural Sequence Farming – Defining the Science and the Practice Workshop. Our partnership with the Australian Government and the other sponsors of these next couple of days has been a rewarding and interesting experience. We have also been very pleased to have supported Peter Andrews and his work through the development of a project funded under the National Landcare Program. I believe that Peter's principles of landscape rehabilitation offer an important way forward for Australia. Our continent has special qualities that require special management.

Natural resource management is all about people and their interaction with their environment. Natural resource management is also about cooperation and collaborative effort. We must respect the knowledge and experience of land managers, be willing to discuss things with an open mind, look for scientifically validated ways forward and provide opportunities for sharing and peer group activities. A microcosm of what these next two days are all about really!

Just a little about Southern Rivers CMA. It is one of the fifty-six regional bodies set up via the Council of Australian Governments agreements between the Australian and State and Territory Governments to enable devolution of decision making about natural resource management to the regional level. In NSW there are 13 Catchment Management Authorities. Southern Rivers' region extends from just north of Wollongong down to the Victorian border and west to encompass the catchments of the Shoalhaven, Snowy and Genoa river systems. This regionalisation of natural resource management is unique in the world and many other countries are watching its evolution.

Regionalisation has enabled the consideration of scale in terms of natural resource management to a much more practical level. When we talk of scale, our understanding of its levels are, site, farm/landholding, landscape, region, state, national, international. Naturally all of these scales need to be able to telescope together to get a genuine understanding of the impact of our actions over time.

To my mind there are three major issues facing land managers in terms of their ability to sustainably manage their land. The first is the economics of agriculture – the need to constantly increase productivity of farming to stay competitive and the pressure this places on natural resources. The second is the impact of climate change – the consequences of which are still being hotly debated. The third is how to redress the dysfunction of the landscape that has been caused by our unwitting management of it.

The hydrological activity in the landscape dictates to a major extent, the health and productivity of it. I believe that the principles of natural sequence farming have a lot to offer in redressing the three major issues I mentioned previously. This is why Southern Rivers CMA has been working with Peter Andrews on a site at Mulloon Creek that you will visit tomorrow, to explore this new way of viewing the landscape and the resultant re establishment of hydrological activity that is enabled through this vision. Southern Rivers had already been working with landholders to recreate chains of ponds and redress bed lowering of streams in our region however the special skills brought to bear on reading the landscape and its previous water pathways and what this means to landscape function by Peter Andrews, has added a new and important element to our understanding.

I'm sure you are all aware that Peter has spent much of his life putting his theories on landscape rehabilitation into practice and trying to share his ideas with anyone who would listen. As with many prophets, he bears the burden of not being appreciated in his own time and I think that Australian Story portrayed some of the major hurdles Peter has had to overcome in his pursuit of acceptance of his ideas.

I hope that the next couple of days will be a watershed in our understanding of natural sequence farming and the principles that underpin it. I also hope that you will enjoy getting to know Peter and exploring his ideas and getting to know each other, as people interested in the future of our country. Finally, I hope that at the end of this workshop, there will be an avenue for further dissemination of his ideas and scientific support for them.

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