

“Catch Water, Restore Land 2023”

Matt Egerton-Warburton, Mulloon Institute, 6 Dec 2023

We were very grateful that Matt stepped in at short notice to substitute for his ill Chairman. As Deputy Chairman, he was highly experienced and gave us a fascinating overview of the innovative agricultural practices that the Mulloon Institute and its associated farmers have developed and fostered, revolutionising traditional practices on many farms which are now adopting these practices.

The central concept is slowing water flows on a farm through “leaky weirs” or “permeable structures”, resulting in raising the water table, fostering root and plant growth, ecological havens, bringing productivity and enhanced environmental outcomes through improved biomass, biodiversity, carbon sequestration and climate resilience.

The Mulloon Institute, founded by Tony Coote in 2011, has 2 research farms covering 2,500 hectares, and associated consulting services that work with landholders to rebuild hydrated and functioning landscapes that are more resistant to climate extremes.

With 50 km of creeks through 23,000 ha of catchment involving 23 landholders, centring on Mulloon Creek north of Cooma, the Mulloon Rehydration Initiative has installed 60 leaky weirs, and planted and regenerated 40,000 plants, benefitting 11 species of rare and threatened birds, aside from farm productivity.

Though much of the Institute’s focus has been on NSW, Victoria and Queensland, on-ground works and projects are underway in WA and NT, whilst workshops have been held in all these states to spread knowledge of the concept among farmers.

Matt showed us the simple techniques used in constructing the leaky weirs at farms near Braidwood NSW, plus in WA, north Qld, and NT, with photos of the improved landscapes after operation.

Keen interest and questions followed from members, several of whom have farms. Efforts to encourage government, land services and environmental support were canvassed, to meet the challenge of encouraging widespread adoption of these sustainable efficient agricultural practices. Healthy native fish species volumes are encouraged, thanks to invasive species being unable to cross the leaky weirs.

On behalf of members, Rod Hanson thanked Matt for his very interesting presentation, and wished the Mulloon Institute well in its important endeavours, including with efforts to gain even better government support.

Peter James