

ACROSS THE PLAINS

THE HISTORY OF THE MURRAY PLAINS

DISTRICT SOIL CONSERVATION BOARD

1949 - 1999

CELEBRATING 50 YEARS

OF SERVICE TO SOIL

CONSERVATION AND

LANDCARE



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This history is based partly on an earlier review by Mark Seeliger and Fred Armstrong (1975) both former secretaries of the Board.

It is necessarily brief and deals chiefly with some of the more newsworthy activities of the Board. The Board has gone about its work with a minimum of fuss but has made an outstanding contribution to sustainable land use in the Murray Plains district.

I am indebted to the following people who helped with printed material, photographs or comments - Sharon Starick, Mark Seeliger, Joan Maczkowiack and Christine Jones.

Bill Matheson
Magill, September 1999

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FOREWORD

The Murray Plains Soil Conservation Board was formed in response to the community concern for the land management issues across the region, notably and most significantly, wind erosion.

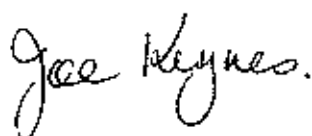
The leadership of those first Soil Board members is to be congratulated as they have ensured that wind erosion has become an uncommon, rather than annual, event. The threat to our farming lands from wind erosion could have been catastrophic. It was the dedication of the Soil Board members, in partnership with Local and State Government agencies and with the support of the community to adopt improved land management practices, which averted that threat.

Soil degradation still has the potential to adversely affect the productivity of the Murray Plains. Wind erosion may not be the single priority issue that it once was, but we must consider a range of issues across the whole environment spectrum.

Declining soil fertility, loss of soil structure and organic matter decline, soil acidification and salinisation are just some of the priority issues that need improved management practices. The issues of biodiversity, revegetation and protection of remnant vegetation are seen as issues of increasing importance to many landholders who consider them vital to maintaining the environmental balance. Soil Boards need to promote sustainable land management, be it in the traditional agricultural practices, in emerging industries, or in changing land uses.

The writing of a historical document should give the community time to reflect and take stock of the past. I hope the written history of the Board, as it reaches its 50th year, will encourage the Board and the community to forge ahead in the important work of soil conservation, in its widest definition. We sometimes get lost in modern complexities but history shows that simple activities and programs can achieve great results.

We should remember the example of those early Board members as the way to initiate action across the region. Leadership and the building of partnerships are examples for the Board to remain vital to ensure the Murray Plains' natural resources are managed to their full potential and will continue to do so for the next fifty years and beyond.



Past Chairman, Keyneton

September 1999

INTRODUCTION

The soil conservation board movement had its origins in the Soil Conservation Act of 1939. Following the appointment of the State's first Soil Conservator, Bob Herriot, in 1941, a small technical staff was appointed to support activities. However he soon realised that the huge scope of wind and water erosion problems could not be handled by staff alone.

In 1945, Bob Herriot went on a study tour to the USA where he came across the concept of community based soil conservation districts. Subsequently the Soil Conservation Act was amended in 1945 to provide for the establishment of soil conservation districts.

One provision of the amended act was for areas proclaimed under the Sand Drift Act of 1923 to be automatically declared soil conservation districts. This provision was used to proclaim the original Murray Plains Soil Conservation District, which included portions of the District Councils of Mobilong and Mannum west of the River Murray. An additional area comprising the Hundreds of Anna, Bagot, Skurray, Fisher, Ridley, Dutton, Jellicoe and Angas was also included following a successful petition supported by more than 60% of the landholders involved. The District was proclaimed on 30 September 1948 - *Figure 1*.

The first Board, comprising four members, was appointed on 7 April 1949 and held its first meeting on 13 April 1949 at Mannum. The first Chairman was J P (Jack) Blencowe of the Soil Conservation Branch, and the members were H B (Bert) Scheer of Mannum, H B (Jock) White of Monarto South and E M A (Ev) Evans of Truro. Bob Herriot attended the first meeting to explain the provisions of the Act, especially those relating to soil conservation boards and districts. He also described the plan to establish 13 soil conservation districts across the state. It was to be more than 40 years before that goal was achieved with some 27 districts now statewide.

In June 1952 Ev Evans replaced Jack Blencowe as chairman following the adoption of a policy to give boards more independence. However Jack Blencowe remained as secretary to the Board until March 1967, having served the Board for 18 years. He made a very significant contribution to the work of the Board and worked untiringly to promote sound land care.

All subsequent chairmen have been farmers, and the secretaries have been departmental officers or community organisation staff. The current chairman is Peter Dabinett of Mannum and the secretary is Sharon Starick of Cambrai.

A total of 30 non-agency people have served on the Board to date and there have been 11 secretaries. A complete list of Board personnel for the past 50 years has been compiled - *Appendix 1.*

Members who gave outstanding service to the Board include Hugh Glastonbury (37 years) Don Evans (31 years) Vic Wegener (27 years) Reg Miller (24 years, including 16 as chairman) and Eddie Thomas (16 years, including 13 as chairman).



Board members appointed for the second term 1952 – 1955

Left to Right – Jock White, Vic Wegner, Alan Moore (Secretary), Ev Evans and Bert Scheer.



Jack Blencowe: Chairman 1949 – 1952, Secretary 1953 – 1967.

CHANGING BOUNDARIES

The Murray Plains Soil Conservation District as proclaimed on 30 September 1948 comprised the portions of the former Mannum and Mobilong Councils west of the River Murray, and the Hundreds of Anna, Bagot, Skurray, Fisher, Ridley, Dutton, Jellicoe and Angas, between the river and the eastern slopes of the Mt. Lofty Ranges.

It is of interest that at the same time the portions of the Mannum and Mobilong Councils east of the river were an isolated outpost of the Murray Mallee Soil Conservation District (Matheson 1998.)

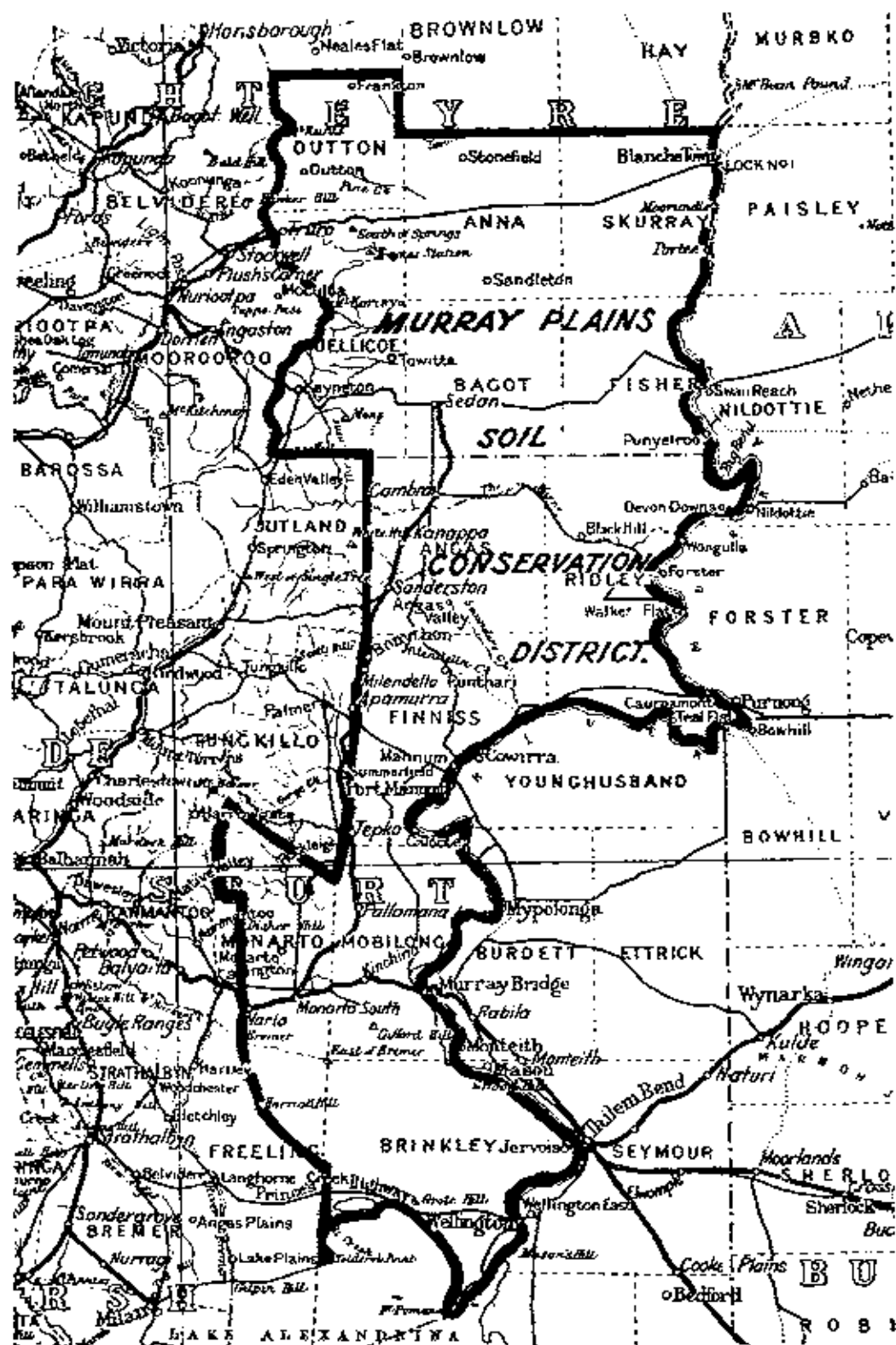
From the beginning the Board sought to expand its territory. In July 1949 it was supplied with the name of all landholders in the district councils of Mannum, Truro, Keyneton and Swan Reach, and Mobilong with Eudunda still to respond. (Obviously the Board was planning to contact landholders about expanding its territory).

The Board worked very hard for a number of years to get a petition supported by 60% of the occupiers of land in the Hundreds of Tunkillo and Jutland, to be included in the Murray Plains soil conservation district, as there were serious erosion problems in the Palmer area. However the petition moved very slowly. It is not known when the petition was started but it was prior to 1951. In 1952 Bob Herriot addressed 'successful' meetings at Springton, Palmer and Tunkillo, seeking support for the petition, but by June 1953 the petition had become bogged down again. In March 1956 the problem of getting support in Jutland and Tunkillo was discussed with the Advisory Committee on Soil Conservation. After that no more was heard of the petition so apparently it lapsed.

In 1974 the possibility of including the Hundreds of Neales and English in the Eudunda area was discussed, but no further action was taken.

Also in 1974 the State Government began acquiring land at Monarto for the proposed satellite city of Monarto (originally called Murray New Town). The land came under the control of the Monarto Development Commission (MDC) and was effectively excised from the Board's territory and jurisdiction, as was land in the Brinkley area. The MDC had complete control of development within the Monarto site. In response to concerns expressed by the Board, the MDC's Regional Manager, G K (Gerry) Woodroffe was appointed to the Board.

Figure 1: Board Territory 1949.



This map shows the Murray Plains Soil Conservation District. The scale is 12 miles to the inch.

Figure 2: Board Territory 1985.

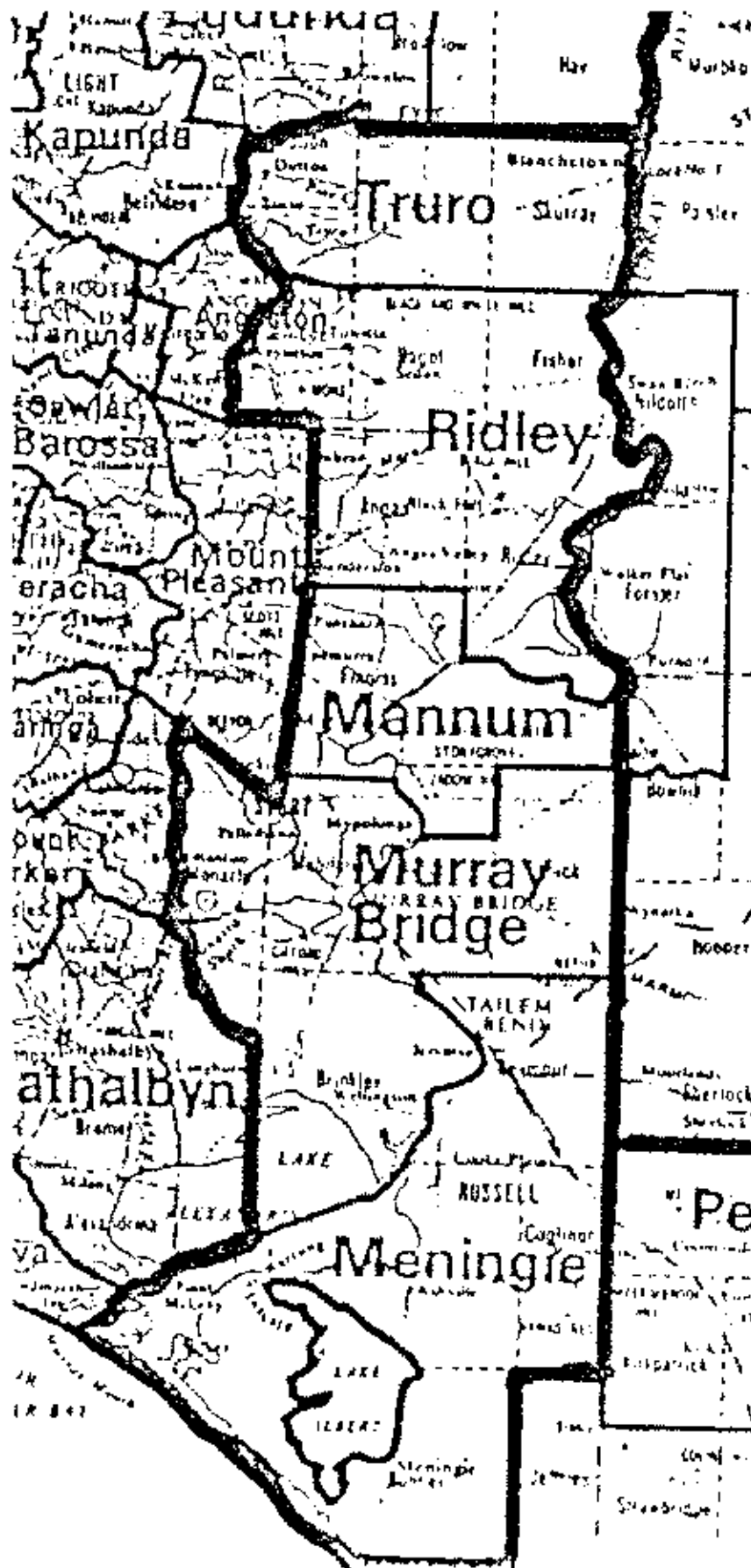
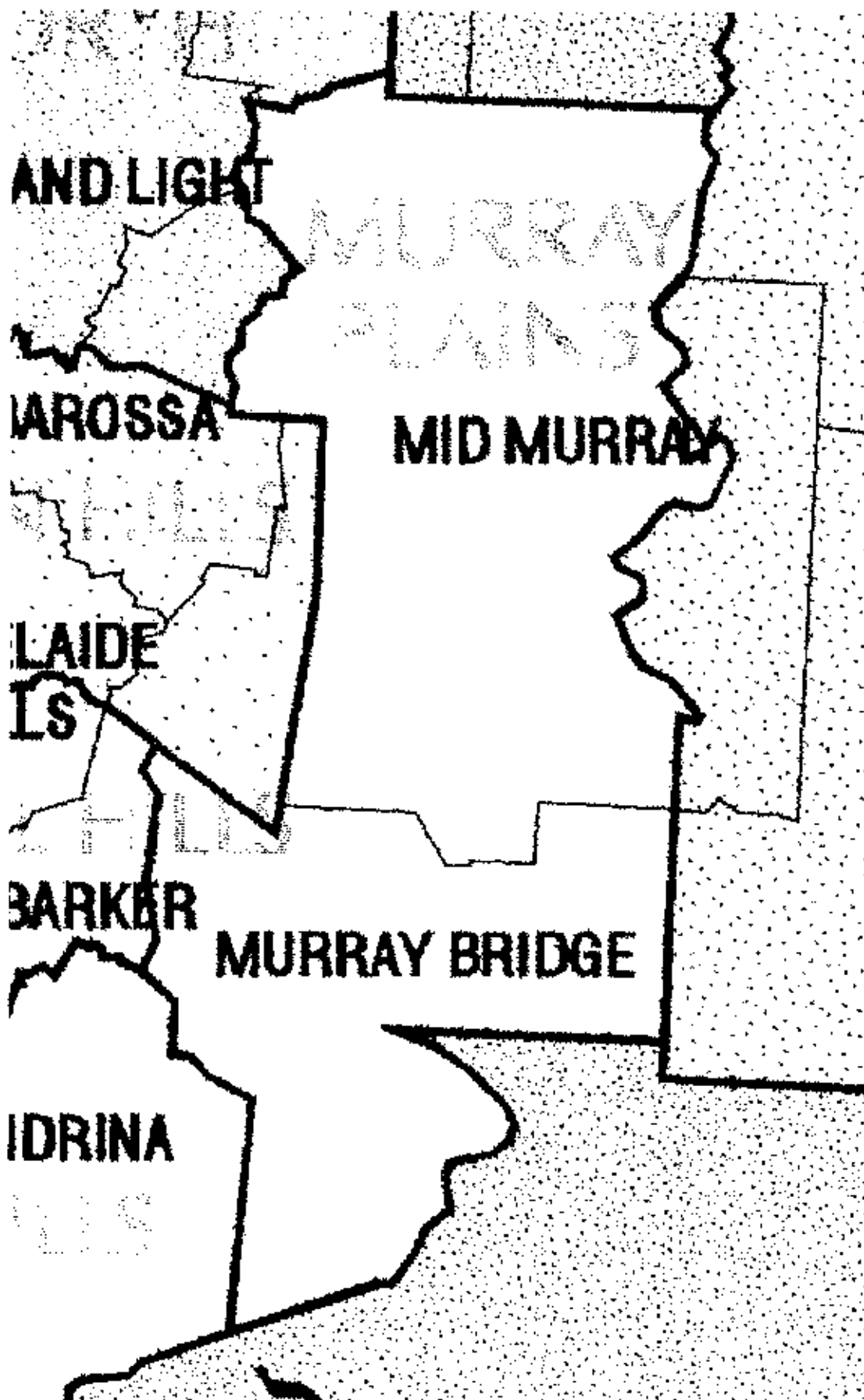


Figure 3: Board Territory 1999.



In 1979 following further consideration, the Board proposed that a new soil conservation district comprising the Truro, Eudunda and Robertstown Councils be established. The resolution was sent to the Advisory Committee on Soil Conservation for consideration, but no action resulted.

In 1984 in response to a suggestion from the Advisory Committee the Board supported proposals to excise the Meningie Council district and the portions of the Murray Bridge and Mannum Council districts east of the River Murray from the Murray Mallee district and incorporate them in the Murray Plains district.

The suggestion was further discussed at a joint meeting of the two Boards at Swan Reach on 6 February 1985 and approved, subject to the support of the councils involved. The new Board district was gazetted on 3 October 1985 - *Figure 2*.

In 1989 discussions began about the establishment of a new soil conservation district in the Upper South East, adjacent to the Murray Plains district. This resulted in the proclamation of the Coorong and Districts Soil Conservation District late in 1989.

The present Murray Plains district was gazetted following these changes on 15 February 1990. It currently comprises the former district council districts of Truro, Mannum and Murray Bridge and the Hundreds of Fisher, Ridley, Angas, Bagot and Jellicoe in the former district council district of Ridley - *Figure 3*. The total area is approximately 483,000 ha.

The Board subsequently raised the possibility of including the former Morgan District Council in the Murray Plains district on several occasions, but nothing eventuated. Instead Morgan was included in the Eastern Districts Soil Conservation District which was proclaimed in 1994.

Finally there was some discussion about including the eastward draining area of the former Mt Pleasant Council in the Murray Plains, but to date that area remains in the Northern Hills Soil Conservation District.

EARLY ACTIVITIES

The newly appointed Board got off to a very busy start – it met monthly and by the end of 1949 had held seven meetings. Much time was devoted to explanations of the Soil Conservation Act and to developing appropriate procedures to use the Act.

By October 1949 the Board had held four field days in conjunction with local Agricultural Bureau branches at Monarto South, Cambrai, Keyneton and Truro. The field days were used to promote good soil conservation practices and attracted an average attendance of 25 landholders.

Subsequently many field days were held in conjunction with branches of the Agricultural Bureau over the following 10 years.

The seventh meeting of the Board in November 1949 was the hearing of an application for a soil conservation order near Murray Bridge. The Board heard evidence, cross examined witnesses and the evidence was summarised. After considering all matters the Board made a provisional order requiring the respondents to sow rye and superphosphate to control the drift.

Soon afterwards the Board met to consider an application for another soil conservation order near Jervois. The Board made a provisional order for the respondents to sow the drift area with rye and superphosphate and to exclude stock from the affected area. This order was subsequently discharged on 3 August 1953 for the cost of 10 shillings. At this time the value of using nitrogen when sowing sand drift had not been demonstrated.

No further soil conservation orders were made until 1965 when a provisional order was made involving a property near Purnong. Since then the Board has sought to deal with such issues chiefly through negotiation.

A circular letter was sent to all landholders in the district late in 1949, describing the Board's aims, intentions and powers and asking for suggestions on policy, but there is no record of feedback. A similar letter circularised in the Murray Mallee earlier created a lot of controversy in the farming community.

On 7 October 1959, the Board presented an exhibit at the annual Murray Bridge Show highlighting the benefits of conservation farming which created 'considerable interest by the public.'

Board members recorded talks for the ABC Country Hour, wrote articles for the local press, discussed ideas for publicity and promotion and made arrangements for the production of a bulletin on conservation farming in the Murray Plains.

This bulletin had a checkered history. It was first discussed in March 1951 and was to include general district information on soils and agriculture, the role of the Board and its long range plans for the future. When first proposed it was to be a pamphlet issued annually, but in August 1952 the Chairman reported that 'Bob Herriot had discarded the idea of a short pamphlet in favour of preparation of a more comprehensive handbook on the area'.

Board members were incensed. They had done a lot of work preparing material for the pamphlet and felt that the publication should be short and to the point. The Board wrote to Mr Herriot in strong terms seeking an explanation as to why the material already written was not considered 'suitable for publication' and asking him to front up and explain himself.

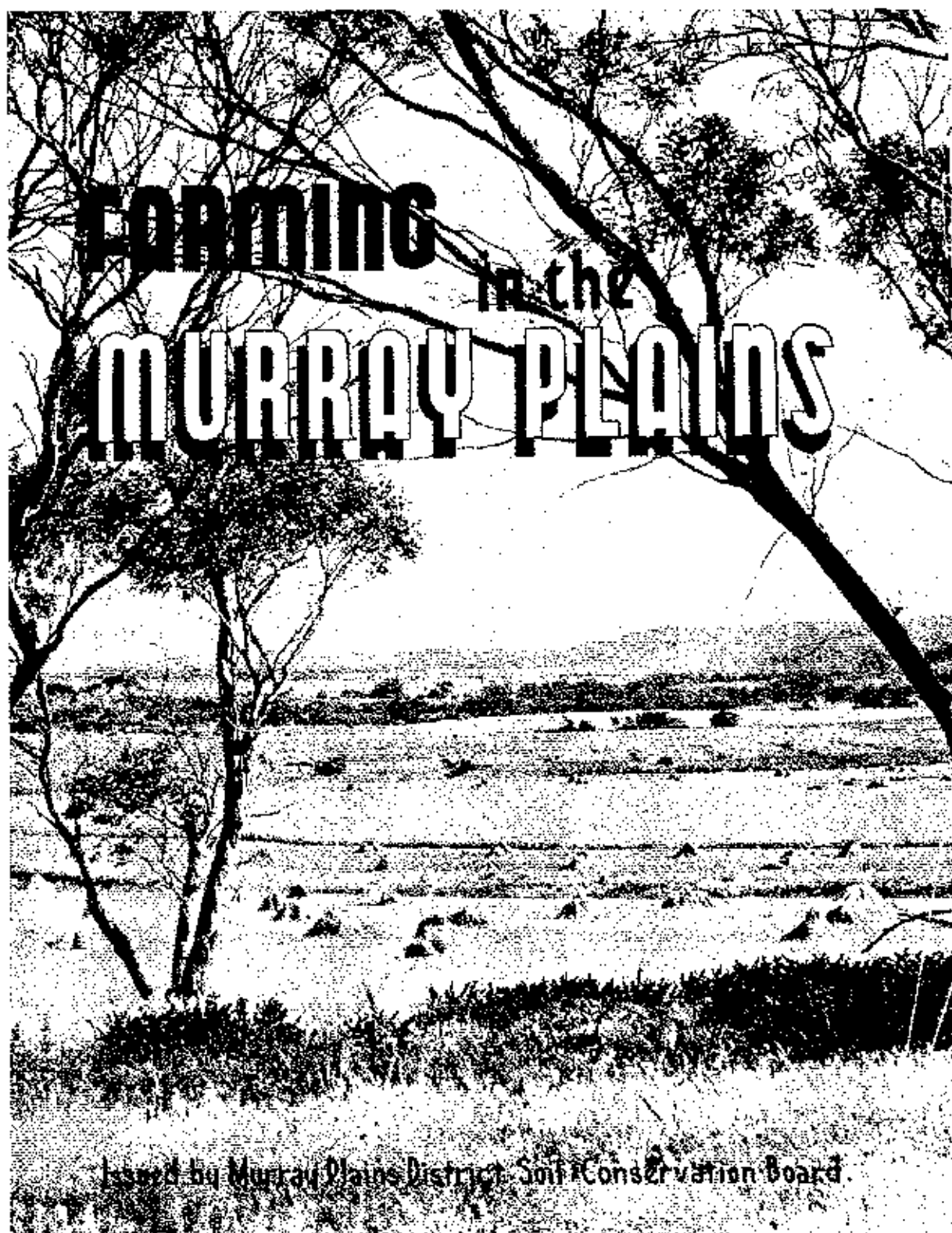
Bob Herriot backed off by September and fell in with the Board's wishes that it be kept short and to the point. This is one of the few recorded occasions on which Bob Herriot changed his mind.

No progress was made for another year, but a similar publication in preparation for the former Upper Eyre Peninsula District was thought suitable as a guide. On March 1954 it was reported that a pamphlet 'Farming in the Murray Plains' written by Vic Wegener was approved by the Board and later published in the local papers. However this is most likely to have been an article and not the long awaited handbook.

By early 1955 a rough draft was ready but nothing further was reported until March 1956 when 'the pamphlet was on its way'. By July 1956 more than 2000 copies had been distributed, and a further 370 copies were being printed for distribution to local schools and the Hundreds of Jutland and Tungkillo.

Bob Herriot probably had the last laugh. The 'pamphlet' Farming in the Murray Plains, consisted of 30 pages of information, mostly technical and apart from a soil map and local statistics it was very similar to the bulletins produced by the Upper Eyre Peninsula and Murray Mallee Boards – *Figure 4*. It is doubtful if any of the material written by Board members was used.

Figure 4: The Bulletin published in 1956.



CATCHING THEM YOUNG - WORKING WITH SCHOOLS

In October 1949 a number of school children from Monarto School attended a Board field day at Callington to inspect a contour bank system and learn something about farm planning.

In May 1950 the Board discussed the desirability of giving talks and holding field days on soil conservation with school children. 'Many farmers' sons would be present and in this way much of the older farmer's prejudice against changes would be overcome'.

Following an approach to the Education Department in June 1950, the Minister of Agriculture was asked to clarify the issue of insurance cover of children being transported to field days.

A field day for Murray Bridge High School students was proposed in October 1951, but nothing happened. In June 1952 the Chairman, Mr Jock White, who was also the Mayor of Murray Bridge, reported that he was now on the Murray Bridge High School Council and to expect results.

In late October or early November, twenty two students travelled to Kanmantoo where they inspected soil conservation work on three properties with Geoff Robinson, Soil Conservation Officer at Murray Bridge. Apparently the matter of insurance cover had been resolved.

Thus began a very significant program of working with secondary schools in the Murray Plains. Over the next 18 - 20 years there were regular outings with students from Murray Bridge High School, Birdwood High School, Mannum High School and Cambrai Area School. Other schools involved were Nuriootpa High School and the Milendella and Palmer Primary Schools.

SOIL CONSERVATION FIELD DAY AT PALMER

A field day held on Mr. Vic. Dohnt's property, Palmer, on September 21, had been arranged by the Murray Plains Soil Conservation Board. Its purpose was to show the High School children from Birdwood and Cambray and those of the Milledella schools the advantages of soil conservation. Over 60 children attended, and showed a keen interest in the talks and demonstration.

Mr. Ed Thomas, chairman of the S.C. Board, introduced the board to the boys, explaining the scope and area over which the board works, which, he said, extends from the River Murray at Blanchetown to Truro in the west, running on the watershed in the Mt. Lofy ranges down to the Lakes, except for a small area round Eden Valley to Tungah. The present board consists of Mr. Burgemeister (at Sedun), Mr. Don Evans (Keyneton), Vic. Wegener (Milledella), H. B. Scheer (Murray Bridge), and the chairman at Monarto. One of the objects of the board was to try and persuade the farmer to adopt methods of farming to prevent soil erosion, and thereby produce better and bigger crops, and stock.

The chairman introduced Mr. Bill Mathieson, S.C. officer of Murray Bridge, who spoke on methods of farming by the pointers under which paddocks were fenced on the square. This meant working land up and down hill, or in any direction suitable to work, having no regard for water run-off. This caused gullies downhill across paddocks.

Mr. Mathieson explained the different classes of land and their use. No. 1, being 0 to 3 per cent, was flat, which could be worked in any direction as far as water was concerned. No. 2 was from 3 to 8 p.c. rise, which, if worked, was cultivated on the contour only. No. 3 was 3 to 10 p.c., on which contour banks were formed from 2 to 4 chains apart. No. 4 was 10 to 15 p.c., crop every 4 to 6 years with contour banks as No. 3. No. 5 was 15 to 30 p.c. for pasture only, and No. 6 over 30 p.c. rise or fall, afforestation and grazing only.

The children showed a keen interest in a farm plan of Mr. Dohnt's property, which showed the different types of soil and the intended re-fencing to meet the contour of the farm.

Mr. Vic. Dohnt spoke on the increased yields he had obtained since he had contour-banked his property which had gone up 3 to 4 bags of wheat per acre. The banks held in spite of eight inches of rain in August this year. Besides that, a large amount of water had come on to his property from land higher up in the hills adjoining his property. He also stressed the necessity of good pasture, thereby keeping the soil in place.

Mr. J. Biencowe, S.C. Officer, Dept. of Agriculture, gave a practical demonstration on surveying contour banks, using the boys as markers for the power grader to follow. The High School boys were keenly interested in the theodolite, and tried their faculty of taking levels by looking through it.

Mr. Biencowe explained that the water coming against the banks was slowed down, flowing away along a grade of 2 inches in 50 ft against a bank approximately 18 inches high. All the water from the banks went into a watershed, which was 20 to 30 ft wide, and was never worked, so that the watershed was always well grassed, and therefore not likely to erode. He also said that banks were not used if— (1) the land was flat and not subject to water erosion; (2) if too steep; or (3) land was not intended to crop. In the last case, single furrows were run on the contour, several yards apart, to stop the flow of water downhill.

Mr. Vic. Wegener spoke of the advantages to be obtained in saving the soil from sand drift, in which case overworking and overcropping were to be avoided. He also stressed that the farmer who took a pride in his farm could usually be picked out by the look of his sheds, fences, etc. He was the one who made money, and liked the living, a good soil-conscious farmer provided for himself and for future generations.

Summing up, Mr. Wegener said— "Keep your land covered all the time. Never use all the feed. When working, do not overwork. Use the right implements at slow speeds, and when necessary work on the contour. Use banks or furrows if necessary; and, lastly, remember if your parents are interested in farm planning or banking, all this service is provided by the Agricultural Department free."

Mr. H. B. Scheer then thanked the High School teachers, Mr. H. Reschke (Birdwood) and Mr. W. Ekens (Cambray) and the boys for coming along. He also thanked Mr. Dohnt for again making his property available for the demonstration.

A vote of thanks was moved by Barry Fox, seconded by David Gladigan, of Birdwood, to the Board for the interesting day. Colin Shenert thanked the S.C. Board on behalf of the Cambray boys.

GETTING INTO THE ACT - LEGISLATIVE CHANGES

The Soil Conservation Act 1939 -1945 provided the legislative framework for the establishment of soil conservation districts, the appointment of board members and local committees and the provision for soil conservation orders. Board members spent a lot of time familiarising themselves with the Act and coming to terms with its limitations. They were very soon embroiled in the Act and its regulations when dealing with the applications for the soil conservation orders mentioned above.

In March 1952 the Board discussed the reluctance of local councils to use the Act to prevent sand drift, a common attitude statewide.

Section 12a of the Act required landholders to give six weeks notice of their intention to clear scrub. As mentioned later, Board members kept a watching brief on such activities throughout the district.

In August 1954, the Board discussed amendments proposed by the Murray Mallee Soil Conservation Board, which put strong emphasis on the responsibility of landholders to prevent sand from drifting onto neighboring properties. It was considered that the proposed amendment was warranted, but that exceptions should be made in drought years. Section 6 j which required landholders to prevent their sand drift from causing damage or loss to others was eventually included in 1960. Another amendment extended the power of the Advisory Committee to do the work required to control erosion after the failure of a person to do the work required by a soil conservation order.

In 1955 Bert Scheer proposed an amendment to the Act providing for the automatic establishment of soil conservation districts where considered necessary. The Advisory Committee on Soil Conservation rejected this suggestion and the Board, not satisfied with their response, sought a meeting with the Minister of Agriculture.

Subsequently Messrs Scheer, Thomas and Wegener met the Minister in Adelaide and put their case to him. However the Minister was reluctant to support 'the automatic declaration of a district without first giving the district a say in the matter'.

The Minister promised to write to the Advisory Committee and ask for a report, but nothing eventuated as he died soon afterwards.

In March 1979 the Board was advised of significant amendments made to the Act in 1978, in particular a section 6 dealing with the establishment of soil conservation districts. Previously a petition had to be supported by 60% of landholders in a district, but the amendment required as long as local councils in the proposed district supported the proposal.

The late Bert Scheer would have applauded those changes and the procedures established in the Soil Conservation and Landcare Act of 1989, which provides for the Minister to gazette soil conservation districts after consultation with landowners and local councils.

Talking Soils At Keyneton



Soil conservation officer, Mr. Jack Blencowe, talked with Mr. Vic Wegner, of Milendella, at the recent Keyneton Agricultural Bureau Conference.

BLOWING IN THE WIND – THE EROSION SURVEY

In March 1963 the Board decided to locate all areas affected by wind erosion in its district by the end of the year. Each board member was to be provided with Hundred maps of his territory and use them to map the drift areas concerned. The data was to be collated subsequently and transferred to county maps 'to provide an overall district picture'.

In June 1963 the Board met with 15 local committee members to discuss the proposed survey. Also in attendance were the Soil Conservator, Alan Beare and the district agricultural adviser, Gill Williams of Murray Bridge.

Mr Beare applauded the Board's proposal and offered the support of technical officers because the survey would be useful to the Soil Conservation Branch as well as to the Board.

Local committee members present were encouraged to organise local committee meetings in their own districts and make arrangements to carry out the survey. Soon afterwards meetings were held at Milendella and Brinkley, attended by Vic Wegener, Eddie Thomas and Jack Blencowe. An action plan was developed and maps were distributed.

It was March 1964 before the Monarto South local committee made a start and a joint meeting of the Moculta and Truro local committees was planned for April to get their support.

Little progress was made with the survey in 1964 and early in 1965 the Board discussed problems encountered by the local committees working on the survey. It was suggested that local committee members should interview farmers with an erosion problem and help them complete the questionnaire. The survey proceeded very slowly, and in mid 1965 the Board was still discussing the methodology.

In early 1966 it was obvious that interest in the project had declined as the district was considered stable 'except for 2 or 3 known badly eroded spots'. This statement was over simplistic since at the time the Board was involved with several major drift problems including an application for a soil conservation order.

Finally in July 1966, more than three years after it was mooted, members agreed that 'there was so little active erosion in the district there was nothing to be gained from continuing the survey' and it was abandoned.

In 1967 a major drought on the Murray Plains resulted in serious wind erosion on more than 8000 ha and many applications for drought relief were made by farmers. The Board and local committee members would have been flat out coping with a similar survey that year.

Soil Awareness Changes Murray Farming Practices

THE drought years of 1944-45 became the turning point, in many ways, of farming methods on the Murray Plains.

Mr. V. Wegener, of Milendell, said this to a general meeting at Alameda of the Murray Plains District Soil Conservation Board and local committee members.

"The emphasis then was on cereal growing in those days, with pasture for grazing of secondary importance," Mr. Wegener added.

Early following was the general practice and it was thought that the more the land was worked the higher the yields would be.

In the drought of 1944-45 thousands of acres lay under bare fallow and the subsequent damage by erosion was terrible.

"Off Key"

Mr. Wegener went on: "There was no doubt that somewhere along the line our farming methods were 'off key'."

"On our own property at Milendell over these two years we had to sell 3/4 of our sheep and our grain yields were down to 1 or 2 bags per acre. I know we did not sell any grain."

"Time passed."

"Since 1945 most of the damage on the plains has been repaired. However, some of the land along the foothills has only a thin cover of

working of the land was not necessary to grow a high yielding crop.

"Springtyre implements and harrows were gradually replaced by scarifiers and chisel ploughs. Slower working speeds left the fallow rough, thus eliminating the dust cause of drift."

"Secondly, farmers started using heavier applications of superphosphate, not only with the crop but also for topdressing down pastures."

"Now what actual benefits have we gained from these changed methods of farming?"

"Through the use of more rapeseed and the growing of legumes in our pastures, we have built up the organic and nitrogen content of the soils. This in turn has increased our crop yields and bigger crops mean more slubbing food."

"So we have a cycle of increased grain yields and increased stock carrying capacity."

"Higher soil fertility also helps to prevent the risk of soil erosion."

"Although at the time we were quite unaware of the reason, our own farm became stable. Grain yields went up, even in dry years, and we grew clover where it had never grown before."

"The figures shown below

	1945	1947	1959
Balinal	1944 4.21 pts.	1947 16.76 pts.	1959 12.46 pts.
Area farmed	105 acres	1,000 acres	1,000 acres
Grain produced	1,200 bushels — 2 bushels per acre	3,375 bushels — 34 bushels per acre	2,160 bushels — 2 bushels per acre
Wool	1 bale — 1 bale per 100 acres	24 bales — 24 bales per 100 acres	3 bales — 3 bales per 100 acres
Lambs	130 — 6 acres per lamb	200 — 5 acres per lamb	300 — 3 acres per lamb
Pigs (Total No.)	35	75	20

vegetative cover, it is doubtful if it will ever return to its former productive level."

It was not long after the drought, that the Government took action and District Soil Conservation Boards were established throughout the State. Local Soil Conservation Committees followed soon after.

Changed Pattern

"The agricultural pattern has changed since those days and a lot of the credit for this change must go to the Board and Local Soil Conservation Committee. Through publicity, persuasion and the use of a little pressure where required, the influence of these bodies has been felt throughout the area," Mr. Wegener said.

"What are these changes that have taken place?"

"Well, first it was found that early fallow and continuous

are taken from our own farm records and are expressed on a per acre basis."

"These figures show the increase in production over the dry years. However, in good seasons production is even higher."

For First Time

"In 1958 we cut clover hay for the first time in the history of the farm — 3,000 bales from 60 acres and the same year we also cut 1,000 bales of cereal hay. Again, in 1958 we managed to cut 8,000 bales of cereal hay."

"These figures are probably not outstanding in the district but they will serve to indicate the present trend of production throughout the area."

"What of the future?" asked Mr. Wegener. "It is obvious that these farming changes have brought to light two things: —

• "The necessity for building up soil fertility by the increased use of superphosphate and the inclusion of a legume in the pasture."

• "The provision of adequate fodder reserves to enable increasing stock numbers to be carried over a lean period. This can be done by the sowing of oats in stubble and conserving more fodder in the form of hay or grain."

"This change in our agricultural pattern has certainly brought a more stable form of agriculture to the Murray Plains."

"Conservation of the soil should be a prime consideration on all farms and many farmers have proved that it is a profitable business, profitable not only to the individual but to the nation as a whole."

MAJOR DROUGHTS – THE PLAINS ON THE MOVE

A combination of low, unreliable rainfall and sandy soils is a potent mix, requiring extremely skilled management to minimise wind erosion.

The Murray Plains district has had its fair share of droughts and on several occasions sand drift has been noted as a major problem across the district.

The Report of the Soil Conservation Committee (Anon. 1938) showed a large area of 'moderately bad drift' in the Hundred of Finniss, another area of 'serious drift' north east of Punthari and another more extensive area of serious drift between Bowhill and Teal Flat. The remainder of the Murray Plains district was affected by slight wind erosion.

Major droughts occurred in 1929 and in 1943-45, resulting in extensive areas of drift.

Since the Board was established in 1949, the most severe droughts were in 1967 and 1977.

The 1967 drought was considered very severe, but there is no record of the extent of wind erosion across the whole district. However by October some 8000 ha remained bare and in a vulnerable state in the Hundreds of Angas, Finniss and Mobilong.

The Board issued a press release recommending actions in dealing with the problem. These included feedlots for stock, ripping paddocks across the prevailing winds, early sowing with rye and super ammonia and removal of cultivating tynes from seed drills.

The 1977 drought was thought to be the most severe since 1945, even worse than 1967. The Board estimated that some 4000 ha were drifting with the worst affected areas being Sanderston, Angas Valley and Reedy Creek.

The Board developed a set of procedures to help farmers secure sufficient seed for sowing in 1978, including sourcing and advertising the available seed supplies, subsidised prices for seed, and interest free loans repayable within 30 days of the receipt of the first payment for the following harvest.

These proposals were sent to the Minister of Agriculture for support and while there is no record of the outcome of these suggestions, local councils were later given 3:1 subsidies to clear sand drift from roads. There was a controversy when it was discovered that one Council was using the funds for roadworks on a road not seriously affected by drift. Even

though the Highways Department approved the diversion, the Board wrote to the Council concerned (Ridley) expressing its disappointment that funds allocated for drift control were used for other purposes.



Wind erosion in the Mannum area 1977.



Drift ploughing in the Mannum area 1968.

SCRUB INSPECTIONS - WHERE HAVE ALL THE MALLEES GONE?

From the beginning the Board was concerned about illegal scrub clearing, with many reports in the minutes. Members were often involved in inspecting any scrub clearing and checking whether it had been approved by the Soil Conservator.

The Board's concern was reflected in October 1962 when a decision was made to put a notice in the local papers 'warning farmers of the consequences of clearing without permission'. At the meeting on 15 May 1963 it was reported that the article on scrub clearing had been printed by almost every paper in South Australia. The Board had made a big impact and there was a surge in applications from 'all over (the) State'.

However, sporadic unauthorised clearing continued on the Murray Plains, and in July 1969 the Board again arranged for a statewide press release highlighting the obligation of land owners to obtain approval to clear scrub. Strangely, the press release was not published by two influential weekly papers in the district, the Murray Valley Standard and the Angaston Leader.

By October 1973 the Board felt that 'most land holders tended to abide by the regulations'.

During 1976 a statewide survey of remnant vegetation raised serious concerns about the future of native vegetation in South Australia. As a result the State Government introduced regulations under the Planning Act in 1983 whereby landholders required planning approval to clear any native vegetation, effectively removing responsibility for clearing controls from the Department of Agriculture.

Prior to the 1983 regulations, clearing applications were refused chiefly on the grounds that an erosion hazard would result. After the regulations under the Planning Act were gazetted, other issues such as remnancy, habitat and biodiversity had to be taken into consideration.

The regulations to the Planning Act were successfully challenged in a lengthy court case involving land clearance on Kangaroo Island. A Native Vegetation Management Act was proclaimed in 1985, giving more stringent controls.

This was superseded by the Native Vegetation Act of 1991. The current legislation provides that all applications for clearance must be referred to the appropriate soil conservation board for comment. The Murray Plains Board now deals with such applications on a regular basis.

Concern about the degradation of native vegetation in the Murray Plains is implicit in the Board's District Plan (MPDSCB, 1995). About 17% of the original vegetation remains - some 83,700 ha - of which 17,000 ha are in national and conservation parks and reserves (7400 ha) or in Heritage Agreement areas (9400ha). The remaining 66,700 ha are on farms. The Board is currently promoting better management of existing remnant vegetation and appropriate revegetation strategies where necessary.

LOCAL COMMITTEES

At the first meeting of the Board, Bob Herriot discussed the establishment of local committees and their functions which were to conduct enquiries, investigations and negotiations connected with the work of the Board. The Board recognised the potential value of establishing close contact with individual landholders through local committees, but it was not until March 1952 that it decided to seek suitable nominees.

The Truro local committee, comprising M A Evans, A T Andredzke and V E Munchenberg all of Truro, was appointed on 18 August 1952. Two more local committees, Dutton and North Ward (Mannum), were appointed on 29 June 1953, followed by Monarto, West Ward (Mannum), Cambrai - Sedan, Brinkley and Monarto South in subsequent years.

The local committees were good training grounds for board membership. Five committee members, S L Patterson, R P Christian, L H Kowald, R F Miller and C E Thomas were later appointed Board members; R F Miller going on to be chairman in 1969.

In 1970 the Board raised the issue of the term of appointment for local committees, as this had never previously been defined. The Board sought guidance from the Advisory Committee, but got no response. It decided to appoint committee members for a three year term beginning 12 months after each Board term to ensure continuity. Subsequently most local committee members were reappointed on 9 June 1971 for a three year term.

However there are only occasional references to local committees over the next six years. In April 1977 the Board decided to review the membership of the committees as many members were believed to have left the district.

It seems that the initial enthusiasm had waned and the local committees had been allowed to run down.

The Soil Conservation and Landcare Act (1989) provides for boards to delegate any of their powers and functions to a local committee (Section 30), and some landcare groups now operate under this provision. This entitles groups to corporate status and provides other benefits such as public indemnity insurance, publicity and general Board support. Once affiliated with the Board, landcare groups are able to seek funding from government programs including the Natural Heritage Trust, and the former National Soil Conservation and National Landcare Programs.

LANDCARE GROUPS

The first reference to landcare appears in the minutes of the 135th meeting held at Mannum on 20 July 1989. It refers to the appointment of Anne Wigan as Landcare Officer and to proposals for the formation of community landcare groups. At the 138th meeting on 2 August 1990, Board members were urged to promote the formation of landcare groups to assist in soil conservation projects within the District.

The first landcare group mentioned in the Board minutes was established at Mannum in 1991 followed closely by the North Rhine and the Ettrick Landcare Groups soon afterwards.

A list of groups working towards the better management of natural resources is given in Appendix II.

There are currently two landcare groups operating with sub committee status - the North Rhine Landcare Group and the Cambrai Land Management Group.

The Eastern Hills and Murray Plains Catchment Group and the Goolwa to Wellington Local Action Planning Board, although incorporated in their own right, maintain strong linkages with Board representation on the committees and reports at Board meetings.



The North Rhine Landcare Group monitoring worms in pastures at Keyneton.

THE MANNUM WATERFALLS RESERVE PROJECT

In November 1978 the Board was alerted to the severe degradation being caused to the reserve by trail bikes and off road vehicles. The Board then wrote to the Mannum Council offering to give appropriate advice on overcoming the problems. (Significantly it was at this meeting there was the first mention of Commonwealth funding for soil conservation). The Council replied that it had already contacted the Minister for the Environment expressing its concerns for the future of the area. The Council believed that fencing the reserve securely was 'the best way to help the area' but that no money was available for the job.

The Board referred the matter to the Advisory Committee for suggestions later that year. In the meantime the Board developed proposals for a rehabilitation program at an estimated cost of \$53,000, including fencing, erosion control, tree planting and parking facilities. No provision was made for rabbit control which eventually proved to be a major problem.

In April 1979 the Board wrote to the Soil Conservator with details of the estimated costs, asking that the matter be referred to the Minister of Agriculture for possible funding under section 11 of the Soil Conservation Act.

There is no copy of the Soil Conservator's response in the records, but it seems that the Board was extremely disappointed that its 'interest in the reserve was not being taken seriously'. It considered that the proposal offered a chance for the Board to contribute positively and publicly to soil conservation in the district. Other Boards had major problems for which Commonwealth soil conservation program funding was available, whereas 'the Murray Plains (did) not have significant perennial erosion'.

In July 1980 the Board was informed of the scope of the National Soil Conservation Program with \$3.2 million allocated to South Australia for the following five years. The key guidelines were -

- projects to be in areas of declared erosion
- capital works of public benefit
- full participation of local government
- equitable distribution of costs.

At this meeting an officer of the Department of Urban and Regional Affairs detailed his proposals for large scale acquisition of land along Reedy Creek which went much further than the Board or the Mannum Council anticipated.



Damage caused by off road vehicles and trail bikes at the Mannum Waterfall Reserve 1978.



The same area as above in 1999.

In July 1981 the Board secretary wrote to the Advisory Committee again emphasising the need for a project in the Murray Plains, especially one of major benefit to the general public, in comparison to most projects which chiefly benefited individual landholders. An undated draft submission for funding at about this time indicated a revised estimate of \$44,000 for the project.

The Board did not meet between August 1981 and April 1983 and there is no record of project developments at this time.

However in April 1983 the Board was told that \$5000 was available for fence materials. By July \$10,000 had been spent on fence materials and the Mannum Council was committed to erecting the fences.

By February 1984 a redevelopment plan was prepared, with another \$10,000 to be spent on fence materials and 1000 trees were ordered from the Woods and Forests Department. Unemployment relief funds administered by the Mannum Council were used for erecting the fences, tree planting and constructing walking trails.

Priorities for future work included erosion control, earthworks to replace topsoil on borrow areas, direct seeding, rabbit control and tree planting.

From then on the work continued more or less according to plan. An almost complete failure of the tree planting in 1984 through rabbit damage, was a recurring theme over the next few meetings.

Finally on 4 November 1986 the reserve was re-dedicated by Bill Matheson, Secretary of the Advisory Committee on Soil Conservation. The occasion was celebrated with a barbecue and attended by Board and Council members and friends.

The success of the project is a tribute to the persistence of the Board, in particular the secretary at the time, Andy McCord of the then Department of Agriculture.

The Board proposed several other projects for funding including a dune reclamation project at Ashville and a runoff control project at Truro to protect the township from flooding, but none were approved.

MONARTO - THE CITY THAT NEVER WAS

As previously mentioned above, in 1973 the Monarto Development Commission acquired 16,000 ha of farming land at Monarto, near Murray Bridge to develop a satellite city which would siphon excess growth from the Adelaide metropolitan area.

The Murray New Town (Land Acquisition) Act of 1972 enabled a 10,000 ha site to be acquired within 30 km from Murray Bridge. The site chosen was west of Murray Bridge, north of the proposed South Eastern Freeway and included railway and pipeline access. The area was subsequently increased to 16,000 ha and was placed under the control of the Monarto Development Commission, which was established in 1973.

When the project was abandoned in 1982, it left a legacy of some 2300 ha of re-vegetated amenity planting in the southern and western boundaries of the city site as a scenic corridor. The land was offered for private sale from March 1981 with a 240 ha parcel designated for the Monarto Open Range Zoo, an extension of the Adelaide Zoo.

The Board became concerned that much of the re-afforested land would not be protected and decided to write to the Monarto Land Disposal Committee seeking protection of re-vegetated areas, especially where they had benefits for soil conservation purposes. A total of 1300 ha was eventually proposed for this purpose, much of it protected by Heritage Agreements.

Today the valuable legacies of the Monarto project includes the extensive area of scenic corridor adjoining the South Eastern Freeway and the State Flora Revegetation Centre at Murray Bridge which was originally established as a native plant nursery for the Monarto site.



Tree planting at Monarto – 1975.

BOARD FUNDS - PAYING THE PIED PIPER

From the beginning Board members were paid sitting fees and motor vehicle costs. The original sitting fee was £2/2/0 (two pounds two shillings) a day and accounts were submitted to the Department of Agriculture in Adelaide for payment, as Boards had no funds of their own.

The Board discussed sitting fees in 1951 and agreed that as 'members were out of pocket' and expenses had gone up, sitting fees should be increased to £3/3/0 (three pounds three shillings) a day. A recommendation to this effect was sent to the Advisory Committee.

This was later approved and sitting fees remained at this level for many years, surviving the change to decimal currency (in 1966) as \$6.30 for each meeting.

Twenty years later in 1971 the Board again took the initiative and wrote to the Advisory Committee asking for reimbursement of sitting fees to be reviewed. As a result of the Board's initiative, sitting fees were increased to \$12.50 per meeting in 1972, a 100% increase. In 1977 there was a further increase to \$22.00.

Sitting fees have been reviewed on numerous occasions since, and currently are fixed at \$72.00 for the chairman and \$58.00 for members.

Until 1979 there was little Board control over expenditure. However in the 1979/80 financial year the Board was allocated \$800 so that it could plan its activities more effectively. This was a significant increase over its expenditure of \$550 in 1978/79.

The increase was made in expectation of an increase in Board activities due to the imminent provision of Commonwealth funds for soil conservation. The allocation was increased to \$1000 in 1981/82 and to \$1500 in 1985/86. Since then further increases have occurred as the administrative responsibilities of Boards have increased. The Board's allocation was \$2000 in 1996/97 and other monies are provided for specific projects such as the District Plan and promotional material.

In 1992 the Board established its own bank account at Murray Bridge to facilitate day to day transactions and appointed its first treasurer, Geoff Gale.

INTER BOARD VISITS

For the first 40 years the Board had only one near neighbour - the Murray Mallee Board whose district adjoined it to the east. Because the two Boards had many similar features and problems, it was only natural that the Board's first visit would be to the Mallee.

In September 1954 the four members and the secretary met the Murray Mallee Board at the Wanbi Research Centre, accompanied by local committee members from both boards. They inspected medic plots, rye variety trials, nitrogen trials and dune stabilisation work. The Board visited the Wanbi Research Centre again in September 1963.

In October 1969 Board members travelled to Upper Eyre Peninsula for an extended visit with their counterparts. The Advisory Committee granted approval for \$370 expenditure - the Board's trip came in under budget at \$367.23! Having by-passed Yorke Peninsula on its way to Eyre Peninsula in 1969, the Board's next visit was to the small Yorke Peninsula District in November 1972.

In July 1977 the Yorke Peninsula Board returned the visit. They inspected the Monarto site and held a joint meeting with the Murray Plains Board. On the second day both Boards visited the former Potter property at Meningie, (the subject of several soil conservation orders and subsequently compulsory acquisition by the Minister of Agriculture) to inspect the very successful sand dune reclamation work which had been done (Matheson 1998).

In February 1985 the Murray Plains and Murray Mallee Boards held a joint meeting at Swan Reach to inspect soil conservation project work in progress and to discuss matters of mutual interest. In particular the Boards discussed proposed alterations to their joint boundary, which were subsequently adopted.



Chairman Eddie Thomas speaking to the Advisory Committee and Board members, Caloote 1968 - note the ties.

WORK OF SOIL CONSERVATION 1-6-54 BOARD EXTENDING

A meeting of the Murray Plains Soil Conservation Board at Mannum was attended by the chairman (Mr. E. A. Thomas, of Monarto), and Messrs D. Evans (Truro), H. B. Scheer (Murray Bridge), V. E. Wegener (Milendella), and J. Blencowe (Dept. of Agric., secretary).

Mr. E. A. Thomas has been appointed chairman in place of Mr. E. Evans, who has left Truro for the South-East.

Mr. V. Wegener reported that he and Mr. Blencowe had visited Mr. T. J. Hannam's and a neighbour's property at Mount Torrens. These farmers had decided to contour furrow approximately 160 acres. Mr. W. N. Royal's farm at Springton had also been visited, and contour work would be done on that property, as well as on V. Wegener's, at Mt. Pleasant.

It was decided to set up another local soil conservation committee in the Mannum area, in the West Ward. Mr. V. Wegener was given the task of selecting suitable members.

Mr. Scheer suggested that the board publish and circulate a newsletter to all landholders within its area every six months, to contain local items of interest, as well as the activities of the board. It was also decided that this newsletter be sent to landowners in the Hd. of Tungkillo and Jutland, which includes the area from Rockleigh to Springton.

WANBI VISIT

Another decision was that the board visit the Wanbi Research Centre during the second week in August. It was felt that members could learn something if they saw how the drift problem was being handled at that centre. The North Ward local committee is to be asked to accompany the board on its visit to Wanbi.

In the afternoon the Murray Plains Board made a tour of the district to inspect soil conditions. They were accompanied by the local committee members, Messrs V. Eichler and W. Quast, as well as two Hawkesbury Agricultural School students who were brought to Mannum by Mr. L. R. Monfries from Gumeracha. These students — Frank Cole (Tasmania) and Jim Cox (Melbourne) are on holidays to S.A. and are keen to see all they can of farming in this district. They were shown a fenced-off area of sandhills where the

drift has been arrested; also how the wind churns out big areas of sand to make blowholes, caused mainly by single trees in a paddock.

Further, they saw areas of water erosion caused by topsoil being blown away, leaving bare clay soil on which there is considerable water runoff, in this case there being both wind and water erosion.

These students also saw low-volume spraying with hormone sprays in action, and they were shown how different plants react to spraying at various stages and strengths of spray doses.

The next meeting of the Board will be at Monarto South where further soil conservation work will be inspected.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON SOIL CONSERVATION VISITS

The Advisory Committee on Soil Conservation was given responsibility for the establishment and management of soil conservation districts and boards and made regular visits to country regions to provide opportunities for the exchange of ideas and information.

Its first recorded visit to the Murray Plains was in March 1956. It toured the northern portion of the district with Board and local committee members to inspect soil conservation work in progress and later held a meeting with the Board at Murray Bridge.

In October 1961 the Advisory Committee again visited the Murray Plains - the itinerary was almost a carbon copy of the 1956 visit - apparently little had changed.

By September 1965 there was sufficient change to warrant another visit of the Advisory Committee to the Murray Plains. A soil conservation order was in place at Teal Flat and considerable success with sand drift stabilisation had been achieved. Other points of interest were medic plants and pasture on several properties at Sanderston and Milendella.

The Advisory Committee next returned in March 1968, following the major drought of 1967. The Monarto to Rockleigh Hills area and the Monarto South to Sedan railway reserve at Pallamana were still suffering from the 1967 drought. Later they inspected the property at Teal Flat which was still the subject of a soil conservation order and recommended that the order be discharged.

In March 1983 the Advisory Committee visited the Sanderston - Punthari - Walkers Flat area to inspect drought conditions on its way to the Murray Mallee, also in the grip of a severe drought. Several Board members accompanied them on this visit.



Board and Advisory Committee members inspecting contour banks damaged by sheep on Peter Royal's property, Sanderston, March 1982.

LAKESHORE EROSION

In June 1952 the Board was alerted to the problem of lakeshore erosion at Lake Alexandrina. As the problem was common to both the Murray Plains and Murray Mallee Boards at the time, a joint visit was arranged in August 1952 when members inspected lakeshore erosion around both Lake Alexandrina and Lake Albert.

The problem resulted from the construction of barrages at Goolwa in 1940, which raised the lake levels 40 - 50 cms. This caused permanent inundation of areas which were previously intermittently flooded and more seriously, erosion of the new shoreline. Wave action undercut the white sand layer beneath the black clay on the surface, allowing the clay to collapse. Hundreds of hectares of rich grazing land had been lost in this way.

Following the inspection the Board wrote to the Advisory Committee asking that the problem be investigated. The Advisory Committee passed on the request to the Department of Agriculture recommending investigations be carried out, but there is no record of the outcome of this recommendation in the Board minutes. However McCord (1979) reported on unpublished research done by R J French and M Brooker of the Soil Conservation Branch in 1957. They recorded shoreline losses of 5-6 m per year on more exposed sites.

French and Brooker found trees such as willows, poplars and tamarix did not survive, grasses including salt water couch, kikuyu and buffalo were ineffective and that bullrush was best, especially in less exposed sites.

McCord concluded that rock fill using large rocks gave the best protection. Tyres were unsatisfactory and vegetation did not provide a permanent solution. He considered that it was a minor problem affecting only a few landholders.

However the problem continued and by 1990 some 750 ha had been lost. The management of lakeshore erosion is still a priority issue in the district with further research recommended (Murray Plains District Soil Conservation Board, 1995).



Early attempts to control lakeshore erosion with stakes and planting reeds, Meningie.

BOARD MEMBERSHIP

The first Board comprised only four members although the Act provided for up to seven members. When Jack Blencowe became secretary instead of chairman in 1952 and Vic Wegener was appointed to the Board, it was effectively maintained at four members. It wrote at once to the Advisory Committee asking for the appointment of a fifth member to cover the area north of Sanderston. While the Advisory Committee approved the increase later that year, the fifth member, Len Burgemeister, was not appointed until June 1955, at the beginning of the Board's third term (Appendix 1).

In May 1963 the Board decided that two more members were required to cover the Tepko and Brinkley districts more effectively. Finally by July 1964 the Board had its full complement of seven members with the appointment of Lin Kowald from Caloote and Clem Thomas from Brinkley.

The membership of the Board was remarkably stable for the first 30 years for only 13 farmers served as Board members between 1949 and 1979. This stability was due to the lengthy service of several members particularly Vic Wegener (27 years), Don Evans (31 years) and Hugh Glastonbury (27 years). The first Board member appointed from the Meningie Council area was Bede Jude of Meningie in 1986 - who served until the Meningie Council area (now The Coorong District Council) was excised in 1990 to become the new Coorong and Districts Soil Conservation District.

The Soil Conservation and Landcare Act, 1989, required the appointment of at least one woman and one man member (section 24 (21) (C)). Joan Weber of Bowhill was appointed to the Board in 1990, the first woman member in the Board's 40 years of service.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE SUPPORT

In contrast to the stability of Board membership, the technical and secretarial support provided by the Department of Agriculture has been unsettled due to many staff changes.

From 1967 to 1999 there were ten secretaries with an average term a little over three years. Jack Blencowe was secretary for 14 years, Fred Armstrong for eight years and Peter Butler for five years. Other secretaries served between one and four years. The administrative operations of the Board were run from the Department of Agriculture's Head Office until 1967. They were then run from the Department's Nuriootpa office until 1980, finally moving to the Murray Bridge office where they remained until transferring to the CARE office in 1993.

The big loser with all the relocation has been the Board's records, especially correspondence and reports. Fortunately the Board minutes have survived intact - while these have provided most of the information in this historic review, some details have been lost.

SOIL CONSERVATION ORDERS

The original Soil Conservation Act provided for soil conservation orders which could require landholders to do certain things to control erosion on their properties. The process involved affected persons applying to the Board for a soil conservation order. The Board was then required to seek a resolution of the dispute by negotiation. If this failed a formal hearing would be arranged with witnesses and cross examination.

The Board could either dismiss the application or make a provisional order, which had to be confirmed by the Advisory Committee on Soil Conservation.

Under the Soil Conservation and Landcare Act 1989 there is an essentially similar process.

There have been few applications for soil conservation orders in the Murray Plains district. They comprise the following:

	APPLICATION	YEAR	RESULTS
1	H D Humphrey v C H Forrest and Executor & Trustee Agency	1949	Order made 18/11/49 Expired 28/2/51
2	E C Schulz v J McGregor and D L Simms	1950	Order made 1/5/50 against McGregor only discharged 3/8/53
3	Gregory v Costeloe	1954	Withdrawn prior to hearing
4	Marne District Council v K Hartman	1964	Order made 13/4/65 discharged 26/3/68

When the district was extended by including the Meningie Council district in 1985, the Board inherited two continuing soil conservation orders in the Tailem Bend - Wellington East area. These were:

	APPLICATION	YEAR	RESULTS
1	J A Hawke v Placid Estates	1978	Order made
2	I Marra v Emerald Securities	1978	Order made

An application was made for the removal of the order on the Placid Estates land in 1989 but the Board refused the application. Although the drift had been stabilised, rabbit infestation was heavy. The Board refused to consider discharging the order until the rabbits were eradicated. In 1990 when the former Meningie Council District was excised from the Murray Plains and included in the new Coorong and Districts district, the new Board inherited the Placid Estates soil conservation order.

Currently there is one soil conservation order in force in the Murray Plains district.

CROP COMPETITIONS

Crop competitions sponsored by the Agricultural Bureau, have been for many years and still are a feature of the Murray Plains district.

In 1953 the Board discussed the criteria on which the competitions were judged and condemned 'the basis of which some of the points were allotted in wheat crop competitions'. This condemnation related to weed control. Apparently the requirement for weed free land had led to excessive cultivation 'contrary to good farming principles'.

The matter did not warrant a mention again until July 1996 when the Board proposed the introduction of a category for minimum tillage and wrote to the Crop Competition Committee.

Following a favorable reception to the proposal the Crop Competition Committee agreed to include a perpetual trophy for conservation farming. The Board agreed to inscribe the words 'Conservation Farming Best Minimum Tillage Crop' on a mounted chrome plated machine point.

The first trophy was presented to Tim Starkey in 1996 for a barley crop. In 1998 Clem Bormann won the Board's perpetual trophy for minimum tillage with a crop of Schooner barley.



Barley judge Ian Rice (right) and Rex Bormann (left) present Clem Bormann (centre) with the Murray Plains Soil Conservation Board Perpetual Trophy.

CARING FOR THE RURAL ENVIRONMENT - THE CARE PROGRAM

The Care Program (Community Action for the Rural Environment) which began in 1991, a joint effort between the Murray Plains, Murray Mallee and Coorong and Districts Soil Conservation Boards, was funded by the Murray Darling Basin Natural Resources Management Strategy.

It was first called the 'Local Action Program (LAP)' but in February 1992 this was changed to 'Community Action: Land and Water', eventually becoming 'Community Action for the Rural Environment' (CARE) in March 1992.

The Minister for the Environment, Ms Susan Lenehan, launched the CARE program on 12 May 1992.

The initial objective of the program was to reduce land degradation and promote rehabilitation of natural resources in agricultural industries and the wider community by providing a framework for focussed natural resource management in the South Australian portion of the Murray Darling Basin.

The CARE program, now much expanded to include both the riverine and urban communities, has provided a framework for community leadership, control and participation in natural resources management. During the past eight years the CARE program has funded a wide variety of activities in the district.

The major project funded was the preparation of the District Plan in 1995. Other initiatives included workshops, soil pit field days, promotion of property management planning workshops, information booklets and funding of small projects.

Since 1994 the emphasis has been on Local Action Planning introduced and promoted by the Murray Darling Basin Commission to promote integrated planning and implementation of on ground works dealing with natural resource management issues.

In April 1996 the Board was informed of proposals to appoint a steering committee to discuss local action planning in the Mannum - Wellington area. By July 1996 the Steering Committee had been appointed and a member nominated to report regularly to the Board.

The Soil Board's CARE Committee, consisting of the four Boards, Murray Plains, Murray Mallee, Coorong and District and Eastern Districts, provides an avenue for the exchange of information and encourages the pooling of resources and joint projects.

Subsequently another LAP group was established for the Eastern Hills and Murray Plains and a third for the 'Plains and catchment area around Lake Alexandrina from Goolwa to Wellington' (now known as the Goolwa to Wellington LAP area).

The LAP committees are now running their own programs such as the development of local revegetation strategies, biodiversity strategies, assessment of priority land degradation issues, wetlands consultancies and sustainable recreation management studies, with regular reports to the Board.

In March 1998, the Board in planning for the review of its action plan agreed 'that the Local Action Plans are the vehicles for achieving (its) goals' and agreed to work closely with the LAP committees to achieve these goals.



A Soil Pit Field Day held in the Sedan – Cambrai district, 1992.

THE DISTRICT PLAN

The 1989 Soil Conservation and Landcare Act required all Boards to prepare a district plan. This was to detail the physical resources of the district and to promote appropriate management practices to ensure that these resources are protected and that agriculture is sustainable. An action plan to achieve the goals was essential. District Plans were to be reviewed three yearly as necessary.

The matter of district planning (and three year plans) was first discussed at a joint meeting of soil conservation boards in April 1988.

One of the outcomes of district planning is a list of priority issues for action planning. The Board had discussed such priorities as early as April 1986 when it ranked soil conservation problems in order of priority as wind erosion, water erosion and flooding, and salinity.

It also listed land management issues impacting on the problems. These were tillage techniques, soil fertility, stock management, rotations, economic pressures, pest control and dryland salinity management.

In March 1987 the Board agreed on the goals for the year which included completing the Mannum Waterfalls Reserve project and an investigation of land management problems affecting hobby farmers.

In March 1989 the Board considered that the main land degradation issues to be addressed in the following three years were wind erosion in the Meningie area, dryland salinity at Cooke Plains and management of hobby farms.

These approaches to district planning occurred prior to the publication of its district plan and three year program in 1995, confirming that the Board was being pro-active in its management program.

The evolution of the plan began following a discussion at the August 1990 meeting of the Board. At this meeting Glen Gale, a departmental officer responsible for preparing the first two district plans - West Broughton and Murray Mallee - encouraged Board members to get involved in defining land types and appropriate management regimes.

In July 1991 the Board identified the main land management issues as availability of suitable legumes, fallowing practices, water erosion control, conservation farming, salinity and irrigation practices.

In June 1992 a project officer was appointed to collate district information for the district plan. This included a postal survey of landholders which provided useful information for the preparation of a working document.

A consultant was appointed in February 1994 to complete the district plan. A draft was presented to the board in late March and was subsequently discussed at regional workshops around the Murray Plains district. The draft was modified as appropriate.

Although the Board was not satisfied with the draft it went ahead with a series of public information nights at Murray Bridge, Sedan and Mannum with community consultation / input invited in March 1995. Finally in May 1995 the Board approved the final layout and the printing of 1000 copies.

After a prolonged gestation, the Murray Plains Soil Conservation Board's District Plan was launched at the Murray Bridge Local Government Centre on 20 September 1995 by the Hon Mike Elliott MLC. The District Plan was distributed through a community day held at 'Lindisfarne' on 29 September, where a highlight of the day was landcare groups discussing their activities.

In January 1996 a draft Action Plan was released by the Board detailing issues and proposed activities to address the issues, but no further action was taken pending the appointment of a new Board. A revised version of the Action Plan was released in February 1997. The priority issues listed were:

- Soil chemical fertility
- Soil acidification
- Wind erosion
- Water erosion
- Non wetting soils
- Dryland salinity
- Pasture productivity
- Pest animals
- Weeds
- Native vegetation

- Water resources
- Lakeshore erosion
- Property management planning

A goal was established for issues and a list of activities to meet those goals was prepared.

In effect the document became the Board's Three Year Plan.



The Hon. Mike Elliot MLC (centre) with Joe Keynes (right) and Jo Gemmell (left) at the launch of the Murray Plains Soil Conservation Board's District Plan and the Coorong and Districts Soil Conservation Board's District Plan, 1995.

**YOU ARE INVITED TO A BBQ AND
DISTRIBUTION DAY for the Murray Plains
Soil Conservation Board's
DISTRICT PLAN.**

**FRIDAY SEPTEMBER 29th,
11.00 - 1.00 for lunch,
LINDISFARNE CAMP, MAURICE ROAD,
MURRAY BRIDGE.**

A District Plan is a document written by the Soil Conservation Board to be a guide for local landholders and others managing soils, water and vegetation. It describes the areas soils, geology, vegetation, climate etc and then identifies the highest priority land management issues. These issues were chosen as a result of several public consultation meetings. The Board then recommends the best management strategies for each issue.

The Soil Board aims to give a copy of the plan to ALL landholders in their district, so here is a good chance to get your copy.

Members of local landcare groups will be presenting updates about their projects on the day.

**ALL WELCOME - PLEASE PHONE JO MURPHY
ON 085 321 432 TO CONFIRM NUMBERS FOR
CATERING A.S.A.P.**

IN THE LIMELIGHT - BOARD PUBLICITY

From the beginning the Board actively promoted its role and activities. As early as October 1951 Board member H B (Jock) White, who was also the Mayor of Murray Bridge, arranged a meeting in the Mayor's Chamber with the Board, the Mobilong District Council, the Irrigation Trust, the Show Society, the Departments of Land and Agriculture and local schools.

Mr White explained the Board's duties and the organisations present were invited to give the Board their wholehearted support so that it could get on with its job.

In October 1952 members of the Murray Valley Development League's Regions 5 and 6 Conservation Committee were taken on a tour of the district to give them a better understanding of the Board's problems.

In July 1957 a film night was held at Moculta to promote interest in erosion control. Moculta was considered to be a black spot and much effort was spent in trying to get landholders interested in erosion control. However small farm size did not make it easy for land holders to change their practices and progress was slow. Another film night was held there in July 1959.

In March 1964 Board members discussed the value of TV as an extension method. They considered that a film of erosion control work on Andretzkes at Truro could have great impact.

Over the years many stories and contributed articles were published in the local press. Unfortunately few records were kept of this important activity of the Board.



Board chairman Ev Evans holds Vic Dohnt's farm plan while
Soil Conservation Officer Alan Moore examines the soil profile, Palmer 1953.

DEMONSTRATION PLOTS

In April 1957 clover demonstration plots were first mentioned. They were to be sown at Monarto South and Brinkley with a variety of cultivars suitable for the district. The plots were intended to encourage landholders to sow clovers after seeing them growing under favourable conditions. However 1957 was a very dry year and establishment was poor.

In 1958 more clover plots were sown at Mannum and Cambrai with moderate success. Others followed at Palmer, Truro and Moculta in 1959, at Tepko and Punthari in 1961 and at Towitta and Brinkley in 1962.

After a break of several years, more plots were established at Sedan, Mannum, Caloote and Brinkley in 1965 with indifferent results because of adverse seasonal conditions. The following year also got off to a poor start and plans to establish four more sites were cancelled.

In 1967 the Board planned to establish seven sites by undersowing crops with clovers. However that year was marked by a major drought in the district and none were sown.

Demonstration clover plots were discontinued by the Board shortly after, as most landholders appeared well informed on the subject of clover and medics.

EPILOGUE

When the Board began its work in 1949, wind and water erosion, which had dominated the landscape for 50 years, had been exacerbated by the droughts of the early 1940's. These issues occupied much of the Board's time well into the 1960's and 1970's.

However the Board always made time to promote sound land management through field days and demonstration. It has done outstanding work with district schools, rightly believing that it was important to sell good farming practices to the farmers of the future.

The introduction of better farming practices, including stubble retention, minimum tillage and direct drilling has led to major improvements in sustainable farming practices in the Murray Plains. Wind and water erosion are no longer the priority problems of the past, allowing the Board to focus its attention on the broader picture and issues such as soil structure and organic matter decline, soil acidification and soil salinisation.

The protection of remnant vegetation, revegetation and the establishment of corridors which all contribute to biodiversity are being fostered by local action plans. Undoubtedly further initiatives will follow.

The Board can look forward to the future with confidence. With the support of local landcare groups, local catchment and vegetation groups and branches of the Agricultural Bureau, it can continue to promote sustainable farming practices, which will provide a better way of life across the plains.

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APPENDIX I

BOARD PERSONNEL

Term I

1949 - 1952

J P Blencowe, Department of Agriculture,
Chairman

H B Scheer, Mannum, Council representative

H B White, Monarto South

E M A Evans, Truro

Term II

1952 - 1955

E M A Evans, Chairman

H B Scheer, Council Representative

H B White

A W Moore, Department of Agriculture -
Secretary

V E Wegener, Milendella

J P Blencowe, Secretary vice Moore from
29/6/53

E A Thomas, Monarto South, vice H B White

D B A Evans, Keyneton - vice E Evans from
22/6/54

E A Thomas, Chairman from 22/6/54

TERM III

1955 - 1958

E A Thomas, Chairman

H B Scheer, Council Representative

V E Wegener

D B Evans

L E Burgemeister, Sedan

J P Blencowe, Advisor

TERM IV

1958 - 1961

E A Thomas, Chairman

V E Wegener

D B Evans

L E Burgemeister

H W Glastonbury, Council Representative

J P Blencowe, Advisor

TERM V

1961 - 1964

E A Thomas, Chairman

V E Wegener

D B Evans

H W Glastonbury

R F Miller, Sanderston, Council
Representative

J P Blencowe, Advisor

TERM VI

1964 - 1967

Board membership increased from 5 to 7
members

E A Thomas, Chairman

V E Wegener

H W Glastonbury

R F Miller, Council Representative

C E Thomas, Brinkley (new member)

L H Kowald, Caloote (new member)

J P Blencowe, Advisor

M T Seeliger, Advisor, vice, Blencowe from
8/3/67

TERM VII

1967 - 1970

E A Thomas, Chairman

D B Evans

V E Wegener

H W Glastonbury

R F Miller, Council Representative

C E Thomas

L H Kowald

M T Seeliger, Advisor

R Radford, Secretary, vice Seeliger from
16/9/68

W E Matheson, Secretary, vice, Radford from
19/9/69

R F Miller, Chairman, vice E A Thomas from
12/3/69

R P Christian, Murray Bridge, vice, C E
Thomas from 24/6/70

TERM VIII

1970 - 1973

R F Miller, Chairman

D B Evans

H W Glastonbury

L H Kowald

V E Wegener

S G Patterson

R P Christian

W E Matheson, Advisor

F W Armstrong, Secretary, vice, Matheson
from 26/4/72

TERM IX

1973 - 1976

R F Miller, Chairperson

D B Evans

H W Glastonbury

L H Kowald

V E Wegener

S G Patterson (resigned 13/3/75)

R P Christian (resigned 14/2/74)

F W Armstrong, Advisor

TERM X

1976 - 1979

R F Miller, Sanderston, Chairman

V E Wegener, Palmer

D B A Evans, Keyneton

H W Glastonbury, Towilla

P J Royal, Sanderston

G K Woodroffe, Monarto Commission

F W Armstrong, Secretary

TERM XI

1979 - 1982

R F Miller, Sanderston, Chairman

D L Abraham, Council Representative

P J Royal, Sanderston

H W Glastonbury, Towitta

W R Bowring

D B A Evans, Keyneton

G K Woodroffe, Monarto Commission to
31/12/81

F W Armstrong, Secretary to 28/2/80

A K McCord, Secretary from 1/2/80

TERM XII

1982 - 1985

R F Miller, Sanderston, Chairman

D B A Evans, Keyneton

P J Royal, Sanderston

D L Abraham, Tepko, Council Representative

H W Glastonbury, Towitta

I P Paech, Tepko from 10/11/83

R J Schmidt, Dutton, from 16/4/84

A K McCord, secretary to 30/6/84

W J Davies, Secretary from 1/7/84

TERM XIII

1985 - 1988

D L Abraham, Tepko, Chairman

P J Royal, Sanderston

R J Schmidt, Dutton

J L Keynes, Keyneton

H W Glastonbury, Towitta

I P Paech, Tepko

A B Jude, Meningie from 30/9/86

W J Davies, Secretary to 31/3/87

W R Hack, Secretary from 1/4/87

TERM XIV

1988 - 1991

D L Abraham, Tepko, Chairman

A B Jude, Meningie

H W Glastonbury, Towitta

P J Royal, Sanderston

I P Paech, Tepko to 30/6/90

J L Keynes, Keyneton

G B Gale, Monarto South from 1/7/90

W R Hack, Secretary

J Weber from 1/7/90

R J Schmidt, Dutton

P R Butler, Secretary from 14/2/91

TERM XV

1991 - 1993

D L Abraham, Tepko, Chairman

H W Glastonbury, Towitta

P J Royal, Sanderston

J Weber, Murray Bridge

J L Keynes, Keyneton

R J Schmidt, Dutton

G B Gale

P R Butler, Secretary

TERM XVI

1993 - 1996

J L Keynes, Keyneton, Chairman

D L Abraham, Tepko

G B Gale, Monarto South

J Stone, Black Hill

J Weber, Murray Bridge

H W Glastonbury, Towitta

B Lewis, Murray Bridge

P R Butler, Secretary to 28/2/95

J Murphy, Secretary from 1/3/95

TERM XVII

1996 - 1999

J L Keynes, Keyneton, Chairman

B Lewis, Murray Bridge

J Bormann, Mannum

C Jones, Monarto

J Schirmer, Cambrai

N Burbidge, Burdett

P Dabinett, Mannum

J Murphy, Secretary to 30/6/98

S Starick, Secretary from 1/7/98

APPENDIX II

NUMBER OF BOARD MEETINGS AND VENUES (13/4/49 - 1/7/99)

Murray Bridge	58
Mannum	45
Truro	18
Cambrai	14
Palmer	13
Moculta	9
Sedan	7
Brinkley	3
Monarto South	3
Conferlink	3
Nuriootpa	2
Mt Pleasant	1
Wanbi	1
Tepko	1
Purnong	1
Swan Reach	1
Towitta	1
Meningie	1
Keyneton	<u>1</u>
	<u>183</u>

APPENDIX III

MURRAY PLAINS MILESTONES

- 1938 Report of the Soil Conservation Committee recommended setting up a soil conservation section in the Department of Agriculture
- 1939 Soil Conservation Act proclaimed
- 1941 First Soil Conservator appointed R I (Bob) Herriot
- 1945 Soil Conservation Act amended to provide for Soil Conservation Districts
- 1948 Murray Plains Soil Conservation District proclaimed
- 1949 First Board appointed 7 April
First Board meeting 13 April
First Soil Conservation Order, 18 November
- 1950 Board exhibit at Murray Bridge Show
- 1952 First High School tour organised by the Board, October/November
First local committee appointed, August
- 1954 Board's first visit to Murray Mallee District, September
- 1956 Advisory Committee's first visit, March
Distribution of 2500 copies of 'Farming in the Murray Plains'
- 1957 Film and Soil Conservation meeting at Moculta, July
- 1958 Retirement of Bert Scheer, last original member
- 1960 50th meeting at Mannum with 20 local committee members and Soil Conservator, J A (Allan) Beare in attendance
- 1961 Visit of Advisory Committee, October
- 1962 Angaston and Mannum Councils grader hire £3 an hour
- 1963 Second visit to Murray Mallee District, September
- 1965 First Board meeting with 7 members, February
Fourth Soil Conservation Order, April
- 1967 Jack Blencowe retires as Secretary
- 1968 Visit of Advisory Committee, March
- 1969 Visit to Upper Eyre Peninsula, November
Eddie Thomas retires after 13 years as chairman
- 1971 Bill Matheson retires as Secretary, March
- 1972 Visit to Yorke Peninsula District, November
- 1974 Monarto Development Commission acquires 16,000 ha for satellite city
- 1975 100th meeting - a dinner meeting - at the Vine Inn, Nuriootpa
- 1977 Visit of Yorke Peninsula Board, July

- 1979 Vic Wegener retires after 27 years
- 1983 Mannum Waterfalls Reserve project starts
- 1985 Joint meeting with Murray Mallee Board at Swan Reach
Don Evans retires after 31 years
- 1986 Mannum Waterfalls Reserve re-dedicated
- 1990 Proclamation of current Murray Plains District
Year of Landcare
Decade of Landcare launched
- 1994 Joint Boards tour of Murraylands
- 1995 District Plan launched
- 1996 Hugh Glastonbury retires after 37 years
Jo Murphy appointed Board Secretary
- 1997 Visit of Soil Conservation Council
- 1999 Board celebrates 50 years of service to the community
Joe Keynes resigns chairmanship, Peter Dabinett elected chairperson

APPENDIX IV

LIST OF GROUPS WORKING ON THE MANAGEMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES WITHIN THE MURRAY PLAINS DISTRICT

GROUP	CONTACT	ADDRESS	
Marne/North Rhine Catchment Group	Ms Merle Clarke	C/o Post Office	CAMBRAI SA 5353
Sedan Cambrai Districts Landcare Group	Mr John Endersby	C/o Post Office	CAMBRAI SA 5353
Rockleigh Mypolonga Native Vegetation Assoc	Ms Fiona Flavel	PO Box 317	MURRAY BRIDGE SA 5253
Mobilong Branch Agricultural Bureaux	Mr Daryl Frahn	PO Box 12	MURRAY BRIDGE SA 5253
Mypolonga Landcare Group	Mr Mal Grundy	11a Willow Avenue	MURRAY BRIDGE SA 5253
North Rhine Landcare Group	Mr Graham Keynes	PO box 15	MOCULTA SA 5353
Palmer & Districts Landcare Group	Mr John Krause	PO Box 95	MANNUM SA 5238
Sanderston Reserve Committee	Mrs Helen Maxwell	C/o Post Office	SANDERSTON via PALMER SA 5237
Caloote Area Landcare Group	Ms Julie Minchin-King	PO Box 103	MANNUM SA 5238
Frayville Branch Agricultural Bureau	Mr Dwight Mountford	C/o Post Office	MANNUM SA 5238
Reedy Creek Catchment Group	Mr Bruce Munday	PO Box 375	MT TORRENS SA 5244
Rockleigh Landcare Group	Mr Brian Pym	RSD 10	CALLINGTON SA 5254
Monarto Agricultural Bureau	Mr Rob Thiele	C/o Post Office	MONARTO SOUTH SA 5254
Cambrai Land Management Group	Mr Matthew Starick	RSD 5	CAMBRAI via ANGASTON SA 5353

