

# WildEyre: Understanding Landholder Attitudes and Perceptions on the Role of Sheoak Grassy Woodlands in a Productive System

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**INFORMATION**

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## Key messages

- In 2010 the Native Vegetation Council funded a small research project entitled “Investigations into landholder attitudes and the feasibility of incentive schemes for large-scale restoration of the State Vulnerable Drooping Sheoak (*Allocasuarina verticillata*) Grassy Woodland Communities on Eyre Peninsula”.
  - The WildEyre group were interested in learning about landholders’ perceptions and knowledge of sheoak in terms of its potential role in production systems and also to discuss the importance of sheoak woodlands persisting in the landscape.
  - Drooping Sheoak (*Allocasuarina verticillata*) Grassy Woodlands were once widespread across Eyre Peninsula, but due to clearance and intensive sheep and rabbit grazing, they are now listed as Vulnerable in SA.
- Landholders at 14 different properties were interviewed across Western Eyre Peninsula, talking about their perceptions of the role of Sheoak grassy woodlands in their production system, with a focus on determining whether sheoak plays a role in primary production and what value they might attribute to it.
  - The research has led to an improvement in the understanding of the drivers behind sheoak conservation. The information provided through the interviews helped to develop a market based instrument to funding allocation for the broad scale restoration of sheoak woodlands on Eyre Peninsula.

## Why do the study?

Bishop and Venning (1986) suggest the extensive decline of drooping sheoak on Eyre Peninsula was a result of early land clearing for agriculture, the palatability of sheoak seedlings and intensive grazing pressure by sheep and rabbits. This intensive and ongoing pressure combined with the short lived nature of sheoaks resulted in poor species recruitment and the contraction in the distribution of sheoak across the Peninsula. This lack of regeneration meant that many older trees die of old age without leaving behind any new progeny.

Whilst the WildEyre group’s key focus is on conserving the natural assets of the WildEyre area, the group realised that conservation measures must be delivered in the context of viable sustainable production. This research would encourage discussion about what incentives might enable more effective participation in conservation programs.

Environmental or conservation incentives have taken many forms; many of which are not relevant for primary producer’s circumstances. The aim of this study was to determine what incentive measures would be viable for landholder involvement in large scale sheoak restoration.

## How was it done?

The WildEyre group developed a survey which examined both the social and environmental value of sheoak woodlands. One on one interviews were held with landholders at their own properties and kept as informal as possible taking the form of a guided discussion than a formal interview. Landholders spoke freely about their perceptions of Sheoak, both in terms of its role in production systems and its intrinsic environmental and social amenity values. The survey also asked landholders about what incentive, if any, might be feasible on their properties and what support they would require over the longer term to actively participate in sustainable sheoak woodland management.



Sheoak Distribution on Eyre Peninsula EP (1800s)



Sheoak Distribution on EP (2000s)

## What happened?

Results from the interviews indicate that farmers have a strong sense of protecting the land and are interested in restoring it to 'what it was before'. This often very passionate feeling comes from family connections to the land and generations in the district. They also have a strong feeling towards the 'aesthetic value' of the land – a sense of what a healthy country should look like.

Some farmers' spoke of the production value of sheoaks for shade, shelter and fodder but this was not presented as an overriding motivation to retain Sheoak in the landscape.

Most farmers are interested in support in protecting their sheoak woodlands. In most cases this was either financial support for putting up fencing and other management practices and some indicated that some payment for loss of production as a result of excluding stock from some land was important. After all, it's hard to be green when you are in the red.

Most farmers thought a 10 year program of de-stocking to allow for sheoak regeneration would be reasonable. Ongoing support for controlling rabbits and weeds in de-stocked areas was also considered a management priority.

Several farmers expressed interest in technical advice for identifying sheoaks, collecting and storing seed and on the best way of propagating seedlings.

Most landholders expressed a strong interest in working together and having the support of regionally based officers.

It was reiterated that conservation initiatives must be timed well and consider seasonality and other management activities. For example, it is not feasible for landholders in the middle of shearing or harvesting to commit time to fencing native vegetation.

Each farmer recognised that coordinated, larger scale projects across entire districts would be a more successful approach than one or two properties.

## What does this mean?

This research into landholder attitudes and the feasibility of incentive schemes for large-scale restoration of the State Vulnerable Drooping Sheoak (*Allocasuarina verticillata*) Grassy Woodland Communities on Eyre Peninsula has revealed several key items for consideration when developing incentives for Sheoak restoration. These include, but are not limited to:

- Determining the appropriate levels of in kind or financial support.
- Avenues to sharing technical advice and knowledge amongst interested parties.
- High degree of interest in social implications – maintaining regionally based support over long time frames and the importance of sharing information from those in the community.
- Recognition that each farm is different and so is each landholder's requirements. Any incentive program needs to be flexible and specifically tailored to each individual landholders needs.

What will the results be used for?

This research has led to an improved understanding of the drivers for Sheoak restoration in productive systems and the logistical constraints of incentive schemes. These interviews gave the WildEyre working group a better understanding of the drivers and motivations of landholders in the district; both in terms of their individual property and personal environmental goals.

This information will assist the WildEyre team to develop and implement a market based instrument for large scale Sheoak restoration on Eyre Peninsula. Although this research was specific to the Drooping Sheoak (*Allocasuarina verticillata*) on Eyre Peninsula, many of the research outcomes are applicable more broadly in other grazing areas of Australia.

## Acknowledgements

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