

LANDCHAT

No. 124, January - December, 2025



Southern
New England
Landcare

Welcome to Landchat #124

Welcome to the latest edition of Landchat, now with a fresh new look!

This annual newsletter celebrates the achievements of our Landcare network and showcases the incredible work our members have done throughout 2025.

We remain committed to leading, connecting, and enabling communities to achieve sustainability goals in a changing environment.

This year's edition is packed with inspiring stories, practical insights, and exciting updates. Here's what's inside:

- **Celebrating Leadership** – Meet Bryan Johnston, recipient of the 2025 John Winter-Irving Bequest, and learn about his outstanding contributions to Landcare.
- **Community Resilience in Action** – Explore workshops and events that brought people together to share skills, strengthen networks, and prepare for future challenges.
- **Native Grains & Cultural Knowledge** – Discover how Gomeroi educator Kerrie Saunders uses traditional wisdom for modern land management.
- **Koala Conservation Milestones** – From habitat restoration to veterinary training, see how our region is stepping up to protect one of Australia's most iconic species.
- **Local Success Stories** – From the revival of Uralla Rivercare Group to the creative energy of the Black Gully Festival, discover how grassroots efforts are transforming landscapes and communities.
- We've moved into a spacious **new office** at 121 Allingham St Armidale, designed to better support our growing team and members. Drop in and say hello—we'd love to show you around!
- We've also launched a presence on **GiveNow**, making it easier for supporters to contribute to projects like our Koala Kits for Kids.

Thank you for your continued support. We hope these stories inspire you as much as they inspire us!



Above: Bryan Johnston of Armidale received the 2025 John Winter Irving Bequest at the November Member Muster in Uralla.

Armidale's Bryan Johnston Receives 2025 John Winter-Irving Bequest

Southern New England Landcare Ltd is proud to announce Bryan Johnston of Armidale as the recipient of the 2025 John Winter-Irving Bequest, in recognition of his outstanding commitment to sustainable agriculture, natural resource management, and community leadership.

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Group Action Planning Brings Fresh Energy to Local Landcare

Southern New England Landcare's Group Action Planning program has been rolling out across the region, with six sessions completed by the time of publication of Landchat.

Participating groups include Friends of Black Gully, Retreat Landcare Group, Guyra Landcare Network, Harnham Landcare Group, Uralla Rivercare Group, and Wongwibinda Landcare Group.

Each group has met with their Local Landcare Coordinators, Struan Ferguson and/or Beth Rosser, to take part in a workshop facilitated by Southern New England Landcare.

The outcome of these workshops has been the development of a Group Action Planning document unique to each group.

The process has brought renewed energy and direction to the participating groups.

Many have experienced an increase in activity, events, and engagement following their planning sessions, with goals clearly defined and strategies in place for future growth.

Some key outcomes of the program include:

- Increased memberships
- More frequent activities and events
- Reinvigorated and reconnected group members
- New logos and branding
- Increased volunteer participation across the region
- Grant applications submitted and, in some cases, successfully funded.

One particularly noticeable outcome has been that the process has made Beth and Struan twice as busy as usual supporting these reinvigorated groups!

The combined Group Action Plans will form the foundation of Southern New England Landcare's new Local Priority Plan.

Any other interested groups are encouraged to contact Struan or Beth on 02 6772 9123 if they would like to take part in the program.

Uralla Rivercare Group Charts Fresh Course

The Uralla Rivercare Group is entering an exciting new chapter following a successful action planning meeting held on Tuesday 12th August at the Uralla Bowling Club.

'We were overwhelmed by the response from the community when we announced the Group Action Planning initiative for the Uralla Rivercare Group', said Elizabeth Rosser, Local Landcare Coordinator with Southern New England Landcare.

'The group, which has been around since the late 1990's, has a proud history of tackling issues such as declining water quality, silt build-up, and invasive weeds in Uralla Creek,' she said.

Over the years, the group's efforts have led to significant achievements, including weed control programs, tree planting, construction of a Shauberger Ramp to protect the creek bed, and development of a popular creek walk and brochure.

In recent years, the group had become less active, with several members retiring or moving away.

However, thanks to the dedication of long-time group representative Bev Stubberfield and the support of Southern New England Landcare, the 2025 Group Action Planning initiative has sparked renewed interest.

The meeting brought together long-standing members with new faces, creating a blend of local knowledge, fresh energy, and new ideas.

"Seeing both experienced members and newcomers around the table was fantastic," said Elizabeth Rosser.

Below: Members of Harnham Landcare at their action planning workshop in July 2025.



She said, “It’s clear there is a strong appetite to continue improving and caring for our local waterways.”

The group will now work to identify and prioritise projects for the year ahead, with opportunities for the wider community to get involved.

Uralla Rivercare Group is a sub-group of Southern New England Landcare and welcomes new membership enquiries.

Jerry Coleby-Williams Events Across Our Region

During October, Uralla Rivercare Group won a \$20,000 grant from the Foundation for Rural & Regional Resilience (FRRR) for a project called ‘Water Resilience & Sustainable Management for Homes & Villages of the Southern New England.’

The group are very excited to be hosting Jerry Coleby-Williams from the ABC’s Gardening Australia as part of this program!

The project will drive engagement, education and leadership in regional climate solutions by empowering households and communities to adopt sustainable, site-specific water practices.

They were also successful in attracting \$5000 from ACEN to support their water resilience social investment program.

To stay posted on these events, visit <https://snelandcare.org.au/group-events.html>

Below: Members of Uralla Rivercare Group at their action planning workshop in August.



Gordon Shares Insights with Mulloon

Well known Southern New England Landcare member Gordon Williams recently brought decades of experience to The Mulloon Institute at Bungendore, thanks to the 2024 John Winter-Irving Bequest.

Invited by David Hardwick of Soil, Land, Food, Gordon joined a farm planning workshop to share practical ideas and experiences from his 45-year journey in sustainable agriculture.

Arriving in Canberra in August, Gordon explored a landscape vastly different from the New England tablelands—with unique challenges like feral animals, weeds (serrated tussock in particular), and sodic, acidic and low nutrient soils.

His presentation showcased farm photos, management philosophies, tangible environmental, production, operational and financial outcomes achieved through long-term planning and sound management practices.

The session sparked lively discussion among farm managers and Mulloon Institute board members.

Reflecting on the experience, Gordon said, “What we’ve learned over decades is about more than farming—it’s about building resilience for future generations, and sharing that information, good or bad, may be useful for others.”

“If even one idea helps them adapt to their unique challenges, that’s a win for the land and the people who care for it,” he said.

This collaboration underscores the power of Landcare knowledge-sharing to advance resilient farming systems across Australia. Southern New England Landcare thanks the Winter-Irving family for entrusting us with one of John’s many legacies.

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“I’m delighted with the board’s choice of Bryan Johnston for the John Winter-Irving Bequest,” said Mrs Ona Winter-Irving.

“I offer him my heartiest congratulations and hope that he is able to do a course or follow a passion this year with the help of the bequest, as he is such a deserving recipient.”

Bryan’s contributions to Landcare and the broader community are extensive and deeply impactful.

His long-standing involvement with the Armidale Urban Rivercare Group (AURG) has seen the successful delivery of numerous restoration projects along the Dumaresq Creeklands.

He has represented AURG as a Group Representative and served on the organisation’s Board since 2015.

Bryan has also played a key role in stewarding public lands within the Southern New England Landcare region and has actively participated in Landcare-hosted training and strategic planning initiatives.

His leadership extends across multiple organisations, including:

- Chair of the Northern Inland Branch of NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service Regional Advisory Committee
- Board member of Bulagaranda (Mount Yarrowyck) Aboriginal Area
- Director at Quadrant Australia, an agritourism company.

Bryan exemplifies the values of Landcare and continues to grow as a leader in the field.

Bryan expressed his gratitude for the recognition:

“I’m honoured to receive this bequest and deeply appreciate the opportunity it provides,” he said.

“Landcare has always been about community, collaboration, and care for the land, which are values I hold close. I look forward to continuing this work and using the bequest to further my contribution.”

Southern New England Landcare congratulates Bryan on this well-deserved recognition and looks forward to the continued impact of his work.

Friends of Black Gully Lead Urban Creek Restoration

Since 2000, the Friends of Black Gully, supported by Southern New England Landcare and partners Armidale Tree Group, Greening Australia, and Armidale Urban Rivercare Group, have been working to restore and enhance the urban creek corridor behind the New England Regional Art Museum (NERAM).

Through weed control, native planting, and habitat restoration, the group has significantly improved biodiversity and waterway health.

The current phase of the Black Gully Rejuvenation Plan focuses on connecting restored areas and extending rehabilitation efforts toward Taylor Street, continuing the vision of a healthy, accessible, and biodiverse urban space.

Community engagement has flourished over the past year, with a series of events:

- 28 April: A Group Action Planning session reviewed progress and mapped out next steps, including planting events, weed management, and funding opportunities.
- 6 September: Native Planting and Guided Gully Walk led by ecologist Dave Carr introduced participants to native species and their role in soil and water health.
- 25 October: The Weeding for Weaving workshop combined environmental action with art, as volunteers removed invasive weeds and collected natural materials for installations at the upcoming Black Gully Festival.

“The Friends of Black Gully continue to show what’s possible when community, creativity, and care for the environment come together,” said Struan Ferguson, Local Landcare Coordinator.

“It’s inspiring to see people of all ages getting involved in restoring this special place.”

The group prepared for the 14th Black Gully Festival in November— a family-friendly celebration of music, markets, and environmental stewardship.

The festival continues to showcase the power of community collaboration in urban Landcare.

Southern New England Landcare congratulates the Friends of Black Gully for their dedication and invites the community to get involved in future events and restoration efforts.

Below: Friends of Black Gully volunteers working at one of the sites.

Bottom: The Black Gully Festival is always an informative, entertaining and relaxing spring-time event in Armidale.



Angophora Bushland Reserve

Nick Reid has recently replaced Helen Stokes as the representative of the Friends of Angophora Bushland Reserve Group.

Nick, who chairs Southern New England Landcare Ltd and lives near the bushland reserve, is keen to reconnect with existing members and encourage new volunteers to get involved.

The group is planning informal gatherings in the reserve to share ideas for future activities, discuss priorities for bushcare and management, and rebuild the community connections that supported the reserve prior to COVID-19.

Nick is working with Armidale Regional Council to review and renew the 2014 Agreement between the Council and the Friends Group.

It may be possible for branches that pose safety risks due to damage by the August snowfall, to be addressed through Council’s disaster recovery fund.

The Armidale Regional Council representative will inspect the site and consider scheduling a crew to assist, but resources are limited.

The re-routing of the mown path to avoid areas with hanging branches has been approved and will proceed soon.

The Friends Group and Council are also looking ahead to reviewing the 2013 Plan of Management to ensure it reflects current needs and practices.

Local Landcare Coordinator Struan Ferguson will host a session with members in the reserve to identify priorities for the next stage of management.

Meanwhile, residents have been active in maintaining paths, and recent wildlife sightings, including buff-rumped thornbills, remind us of the biodiversity the reserve supports.

Nick encourages members to stay involved, share ideas, and contribute to keeping this special place thriving.

Armidale Urban Rivercare's Achievements

By Angus Adair

Armidale Urban Rivercare Group (AURG) has had a quieter year recovering from the Weedy Wasteland to Wildlife Wetland project, planting left over plants and concentrating on ensuring survival of plants in the wetland.

We are seeing some impressive growth in the wetland with tea-tree and bottle brush well over our heads and dense thickets of Carax, Lomandra and Juncas.

All of this is helping to keep the weeds down.

Below: Looking over the wetland site towards the Essential Energy funded planting near the wharf bench, WW2WW project. Image courtesy of Bruce Whan.



Below: Armidale Urban Rivercare's completed Weedy Wasteland to Wildlife Wetland Project along Dumaresq Creek Armidale.



We have noticed significant improvements in the flow of flood waters through the wetland with a significantly increased spread of water movement through the site in low flow periods.

We have had successful bird breeding and this spring the frogs have been going off!

AURG has applied for various grants with no success.

We were very fortunate to be identified as a delivery partner for the Armidale Tree Group (thank you so much Richard Bell!) when they were approached by

Essential Energy for an EOFY grant of \$4,500.

We planted 800 seedlings and with left over funds will have completed three community planting days.

In June, AURG assisted Dr Rhiannan Smith with her Masters students studying Environmental Restoration.

This involved taking mature age students around the AURG sites and having some engaging conversations about the work we do and why we do it.

In September, AURG was approached by Guyra and Armidale Secondary College to run a school education day.

Sixty students came along for presentations from AURG, Sabnam from Armidale Tree Group and Dr Ivor Grown from UNE.

AURG has supported education groups for a few years now, and we are hoping to create an environmental education precinct that will encompass the Wetland and a Koala planting sites.

AURG has been very active with the Armidale Urban Planting Maintenance (AUPM) Program.

We worked up until late May when it got too cold, and have been active on plantings that have not been maintained for a number of years.

We have also been actively engaging with Armidale Regional Council as they undertake a review of the program, hopefully with the outcome of increasing the funding for this program.

In late November, AURG and SNEL will be hosting a tour of the Armidale Creeklands and other bushcare sites for Armidale Regional Councillors.

This will involve looking at old and new AURG sites including the Wetland Project, Koala Planting and Prickly Problems sites.

Guyra Landcare Network Annual Wrap-Up

Following Group Action Planning in April, the Guyra Landcare Network (previously the Malpas Catchment Group, a sub-group of Southern New England Landcare Ltd) had a productive few months working towards its new objectives.

Soil Health & Your Wealth

One of the group's key goals was to bring Graeme Sait to the New England, and that milestone was achieved in early October, when Graeme delivered a half-day workshop in Ben Lomond.

Graeme Sait, internationally recognised educator and co-founder of Nutri-Tech Solutions (NTS), shared his wealth of knowledge in Soil Health and Your Wealth – Profit Building with Minerals, Microbes and Humus.

The session offered a condensed version of his renowned Certificate in Nutrition Farming course, focusing on how regenerative practices can enhance profitability and long-term resilience on-farm.

"We've been fortunate to hear from many excellent speakers on regenerative agriculture in recent years, and Graeme was the icing on the cake," said Campbell Wolfenden, Guyra Landcare Network member.

Graeme is returning to Guyra in February 2026 to run his 4 day course in Soil Health.

Please keep an eye out on SNEL's website for more details.

Seasonal Farmer Update

After the success of last year's Biosecurity On-Farm Day, the group decided to host a Seasonal Farmer Update – a locally focused event bringing together speakers from across the district to discuss animal health, feral animal control, pastures, pasture dieback, and Chilean Needle Grass.



Above: The lineup of speakers at the Seasonal Farmer Update at Ben Lomond.



Above: Participants at the Seasonal Farmer Update at Ben Lomond.

While the NT LLS held a similar event in Armidale in early September, the Guyra group chose mid-October for their update – a decision that proved to be spot on.

The shift from a cold, wet September to a hot, dry October created a very quick and dramatic change in the season, giving speakers plenty to discuss and making the timing especially relevant.

Perry Newman from Local Land Services spoke on feral animal management, emphasising that an integrated and coordinated approach is the most effective.

"Working with your neighbours is often the best way to get results," Perry said.

He encouraged attendees to use free management tools available through LLS, including bait programs, and highlighted the importance of planning ahead, especially before critical times like lambing or calving.

Veterinarian Leisa Brown from Guyra District Veterinary Services shared valuable insights into livestock health, including emerging biosecurity concerns.



She discussed brucellosis risks from feral pigs, the importance of testing for grass tetany, and practical measures such as topping up 5-in-1 or 7-in-1 vaccines and watering cattle yards to help prevent pink eye.

“Get some tests done for worm burden before drenching,” Leisa advised. “It can reduce costs and slow the spread of drench resistance.”

Natalie Mendes from Nutrien Ag Solutions Guyra, gave a very informative and practical presentation on pasture species and grazing for optimal grass growth.

Marijke Hartman, LLS Sustainable Agriculture Officer, updated the group on pasture dieback, which has been spreading from Queensland into northern NSW.

She explained the symptoms, likely causes, and management strategies and who to report to if you suspect you have it.

Local landholder Bill Perrotet wrapped up the session with a practical talk on Chilean Needle Grass control.

Bill described his own experience using brassica crops and selective herbicides to reduce seed set and maintain semi-productive feed, noting that financial considerations were important for each enterprise.

“If you can keep it in a vegetative phase, it’s at least useful feed for parts of the year,” he said.

Between the Seasonal Update and the Soil Health workshop, the Guyra Landcare Network achieved two major goals set out in their Action Plan, both providing opportunities for local learning, connection, and practical action.

The group’s events this year reflected the strength of local collaboration and the community’s ongoing appetite for shared knowledge.

As the year wrapped up, members were already looking ahead to new opportunities for 2026, confident that their network was stronger, more connected, and better equipped to take on whatever the next season brings.

Celebrating the First Year of the Guyra Cuppa Chat Group

The Guyra Cuppa Chat Group was formed in February 2025 to bring together farmers and graziers in the Guyra area who are practising—or beginning to practise—regenerative agriculture.

The first gathering was held at Ben and Emily Evans’ property at Wongwibinda, with five landholders from three properties in attendance.

Ben gave a fantastic presentation on the progress of his farm and his journey towards a more sustainable future.

He shared maps showing how paddocks have been gradually divided into smaller holdings to allow for more continuous cattle rotation.

Ben also demonstrated how he has designed a practical watering system that can be managed by one person, using portable troughs and simple electric fencing systems.

Emily spoke about the challenges of the 2019 drought and how their key goal now is to maintain twelve months of feed ahead to help buffer against tough seasons.

Ben also showcased his homemade fertigation system, as well as the composting and worm farms that supply the bulk of the inputs used across the property.

The second meeting took place at the property managed by Anthony and Elizabeth (Beth) Rosser near Ben Lomond, run using regenerative principles.

Around eight participants attended this event.

Anthony spoke about the state of the farm when he took over management in 2021, and the principles and goals

of the owner that guide its operation.

He discussed soil testing, inputs, and the careful feed budgeting and rotational grazing that underpin the business.

The group visited pastures in their first year of improvement and viewed a multispecies forage crop currently being grazed.

Anthony also outlined plans for a new reticulated water system and future fencing to improve pasture management.

The third Cuppa Chat was hosted by Campbell Wolfenden from Guyra Rural Services at his shed in Guyra, attracting around twelve participants—some travelling from as far as Uralla.

Campbell shared his experience transitioning his business to focus on regenerative agriculture inputs and fertilisers.

He spoke about the importance of soil testing to guide farm decisions and how informed management can help reduce costs in the long term.

The Guyra Cuppa Chat group is a casual, supportive network that meets three to four times a year.

If you’re interested in joining or hosting a session, please get in touch with us for more information.

Peer-to-peer learning is an invaluable way to share experiences, strengthen local connections, and grow together towards more resilient and sustainable farming systems.



Preparing Communities for Drought by Strengthening Our Connections

In 2023, Southern New England Landcare received a grant from the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal (FRRR) through the Preparing Communities for Drought program.

The goal was simple but powerful: to help our region grow stronger together.

Through the grant, our local coordinators Beth Rosser and Struan Ferguson delivered a series of community activities and events that encouraged learning, sharing, and connection across all corners of the Southern New England.

These events focused on Intrepid Landcare, Junior Landcare, Young Farmers, and Member Musters, bringing people together around resilience, wellbeing, and practical skills for life on the land.

The project wrapped up in June 2025 after a very thorough reporting process, leaving behind a great collection of memories and strengthened networks.

Here's a look back at what we achieved together.

Junior Landcare

Red Cross Pillowcase Workshops

In September 2024, two Pillowcase Workshops were held with St Mary of the Angels Primary School, Guyra, in partnership with the Australian Red Cross.

Beth took the program into Stage 2 and 3 classrooms, guiding students through activities about emergency preparedness.

The Pillowcase Project teaches children how to cope with and prepare for emergencies by packing a personal kit into a decorated pillowcase — an idea inspired by students who fled Hurricane Katrina with only what they could carry.

The kids were completely engaged, and teachers commented how rare it was to have outside presenters hold students' attention so well.

Between the bright pillowcase designs and new knowledge about being ready for disasters, everyone walked away smiling and a little more prepared.

Brushes for Biodiversity

Over the summer holidays 24/25, we teamed up with the libraries of Guyra, Walcha, and Uralla to run the Brushes for Biodiversity kids and youth art competition.

Art kits with paints, pencils and colouring materials were made available at the libraries for budding young artists to collect and get creative.

Entries rolled in from across the region, and with so many wonderful pieces, Beth simply couldn't pick a favourite, so everyone got a prize!

The event was such a success that it will return this December, so get those brushes ready!

Family Frog Night

Our annual Family Frog Night was a sell-out once again, held in Armidale for the first time in 2025.

Hosted by the Armidale Waldorf School and joined by Emily and Tim from the Australian Museum, families spent the evening learning about the frogs of our region and the important research being carried out by the Museum team.

It was a fun, noisy, and educational night out, and we're thrilled that the Australian Museum will be returning next year for another round of froggy adventures.

Young Farmers

Resilience Dinner in Walcha

In May 2024, we joined forces with Resilient Ready and the Young Farmers Network to host a Resilience Dinner in Walcha.

Around 20 locals came together for an evening of shared stories and practical advice on personal, business, and community resilience.

Renae Hanvin from Resilient Ready led the night, offering tips on how to turn challenges into opportunities and build stronger networks.

Anna Hughes from the Lachlan Hughes Foundation followed with a deeply personal story about her family's journey through hardship, recovery, and resilience — a talk that left the

whole room reflecting on the power of connection and courage.

"The sense of empathy and connection resonated throughout the evening," said Beth. "It reminded us all that resilience is built together."

The Unbreakable Farmer

In November 2024, Warren Davies, better known as The Unbreakable Farmer, visited Uralla to share his story.

Warren's message of perseverance and mental health awareness struck a chord with the mixed crowd of landholders and local health professionals.

His honest reflections on tough times reminded everyone that resilience starts with looking after ourselves and each other.

Frocking Fabulous: Rural Women's Day in Guyra

In October 2024, SNEL teamed up with the CWA Guyra Evening Branch for a night of celebration, conversation, and connection — Frocking Fabulous: Rural Women's Day in Guyra.

Guest speaker Annabelle Brayley, storyteller and advocate for rural communities, had the room captivated with her tales of strength and community spirit.

"Rural Women's Day is an important occasion to recognise the invaluable contributions of women in our rural communities," said Beth.

CWA President Kate Matthews summed it up beautifully:

"This event was a wonderful opportunity for us to come together, share stories, and celebrate our strengths."

The evening was a highlight of the year — a perfect blend of laughter, learning, and appreciation for the women who keep our communities thriving.

Intrepid Landcare

Empowering Agriculture

In August 2024, SNEL hosted Empowering Agriculture: Advances in Soil Health at the Armidale Golf Club, bringing together an impressive lineup of speakers — Joel Williams from Integrated Soils, Grant Sims from Down

Under Covers, and Dr Rachel Lawrence from Northern Tablelands Local Land Services.

The day offered deep dives into soil biology, biological fertilisers, and natural capital opportunities.

It was a rare treat to have experts of this calibre together in the New England, and attendees walked away buzzing with new ideas to try on their farms.

Best Practice Tree Planting

In June 2025, David Carr from Stringybark Ecological led a sold-out Best Practice Tree Planting workshop at the Armidale Tree Group's Woodland Centre.

The session combined practical demonstrations with local knowledge — creating a fantastic morning of learning in the field (literally).

Koala Konversations

In March 2025, Koala Konversations brought the community together at The Welders Dog Brewery in Armidale for an evening dedicated to koala conservation.

Guests enjoyed a koala-themed beer, great food, and plenty of inspiration — proving that conservation and community connection go hand in hand.

Read more about this event on page 12.

Member Musters

Throughout the project, SNEL hosted three Member Musters to bring members together, share insights, and strengthen local connections.

- Kim Deans (Reinventing Agriculture) kicked things off with a talk on Personal Drought Resilience, sharing how she and her husband Angus navigated the 2019 drought and fires at Tingha. Her story struck a chord with many and offered practical tools for building resilience through mindset and planning.
- Warren Davies returned to deliver a shorter, heartfelt talk on mental health after delivering his morning workshop, reinforcing his message that resilience isn't just about surviving challenges, but growing through them.
- Kerrie Saunders (Yinmarra Native Grains) rounded out the series with an inspiring presentation on her journey into native grains — from discovering them in her kitchen to building a retail business around them. Her passion for food, culture, and innovation sparked plenty of interest and a few recipe ideas!

Each muster strengthened our network and created space for new friendships, shared learning, and genuine connection across the region.

Looking Back

From frog spotting to soil science, resilience dinners to art competitions, this project was all about connection — people learning, sharing, and building community strength together.

Thanks to the FRRR Preparing Communities for Drought program, Southern New England Landcare has been able to reach new audiences, support new ideas, and bring fresh energy to our region.

Here's to everyone who came along, helped out, and made these events a success.

You're the reason our community keeps growing stronger every year!

Below L-R: Annabelle Brayley, Elizabeth Rosser, Sonia Williams, and Rebecca Smith at the Frocking Fabulous Rural Women's Day in Guyra.



Women Gather for a Day of Storytelling and Connection

There was storytelling at its finest when a group of local women gathered in Guyra on May 27th for the Telling Your Story workshop with author Annabelle Brayley.

“The day had a special feel,” said Elizabeth Rosser from Southern New England Landcare.

“Annabelle shared her experience and practical advice on how to shape and share personal stories, sparking thoughtful discussion and reflection among attendees,” she said.

Hosted by Women for Food and Fibre and proudly supported by Southern New England Landcare, the workshop created a welcoming space for women to explore the power of their personal and professional stories—particularly around the shared theme of regenerative agriculture.

The event brought together ten women from across the New England region who were eager to reflect on their

experiences and learn how to express them with clarity and confidence.

Adding further depth to the day, Norann Voll from Danthonia near Inverell led a session on using photographs and social media to tell the story of her life and community.

“It was an honour to have Norann share how she communicates the day-to-day and deeper values of Danthonia through images and storytelling,” said Elizabeth.

Workshop participant Chris Hietbrink from Guyra described the day as “incredibly special,” adding, “how blessed we were to have such fabulously gifted presenters like Norann and Annabelle to inspire us all.”

Southern New England Landcare extends its sincere thanks to Annabelle, Norann, and all the participants who made the day so memorable—and to Women for Food and Fibre for bringing the idea to life.

Connection and Resilience Workshops

Southern New England Landcare successfully delivered a vibrant series of community events across the Walcha and Hernani districts, supported by the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal (FRRR) through the Community Connection for Outlying Areas program.

Between August 2024 and May 2025, six events brought together 179 people to share knowledge, build networks, and strengthen social connections to enhance drought preparedness and resilience across the region.

The journey began with the Knitting with Resilience workshop in Walcha on August 10, 2024, a sold-out event that welcomed 26 participants from across the New England region and beyond.

Led by the inspiring Sam Longmore from Ohh Bulldust, who developed a one-handed knitting method after becoming partially paralysed, attendees crafted their own Merino wool throws while embracing themes of resilience, creativity, and community.

The day was filled with warmth and connection, leaving participants feeling supported, inspired, and renewed.

Below: participants in Annabelle Brayley's Telling Your Story workshop, Guyra, May 2025.



On March 12, we hosted a Managing Native Vegetation and Early Change Monitoring workshop at the Walcha Bowls Club.

The event drew 44 local landholders keen to understand the Draft Native Vegetation Regulatory Map and explore opportunities linked to natural capital.

Expert speakers from the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) and Local Land Services provided valuable insights, fostering an engaging evening of learning and discussion.

A shared dinner further strengthened connections among attendees, illustrating the power of collaboration in managing rural landscapes.

SNEL partnered with Northern Tablelands and North West Local Land Services to deliver a three-part Grazing Principles workshop series in the Walcha district from February to May.

Held at Inglebah Hall and Loita Downs, these sessions brought together nearly 50 landholders committed to improving their grazing management skills and farm sustainability.

By providing catering and supporting workshop logistics, SNEL helped create a welcoming environment that encouraged open discussion, peer learning, and community spirit.

In the Hernani district, SNEL collaborated with the local P&F and Hernani Hall Committee to host a family-friendly Community Trivia Night in May.

Sixty participants of all ages came together for an evening of laughter, teamwork, and connection.

Thanks to project funding, external caterers were engaged, allowing local volunteers to enjoy the event alongside their community.

The night was hailed as a success, strengthening bonds and creating memories for families across the region.

These events have demonstrated the value of community-driven initiatives in fostering resilience, wellbeing, and cooperation among rural residents.

Southern New England Landcare is proud of the partnerships that made this program a success and remains committed to supporting connection, learning, and sustainability across the region.

Top: Knitting with Resilience workshop participants in Walcha. Middle: Grazing Principles workshop participants. Bottom: Hernani Hall Trivia Night. Image courtesy of Lisa Daly.



Koala Konversations Draws Huge Community Crowd

More than 120 community members gathered for Southern New England Landcare's Koala Konversations on 20th March at the Welder's Dog Brewery in Armidale.

A great success, the event provided a unique opportunity for participants to hear from leading experts about the current state of koalas in our region, and the urgent need for conservation efforts.

Southern New England Landcare's Koala Conservation Project Officer, Matt Elsley, said, "Community feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with attendees expressing appreciation for speaker insights and calling for more events like this in the future."

The panel of expert speakers included:

- John Lemon, local ecologist, who spoke about the ongoing decline of koalas in the region, highlighting the alarming trends moving eastward due to climate change.
- Tim Scanlon, NPWS Habitat Restoration Expert, who emphasized the importance of habitat restoration and how maintaining and creating new habitats allows koalas and other species to adapt and move through the landscape.
- Romane Cristescu, conservation ecologist, who demonstrated cutting-edge technology used for ecological surveys and introduced Bear, a specially trained koala detection dog, who was well received!
- Carolyn Hogg, conservation geneticist, who talked about the

genetic significance of Northern NSW koalas, highlighting their high levels of genetic diversity, which is crucial for the long-term survival of the species at a national level.

The event boasted the release of a new Koala Beer, brewed by the Welder's Dog, which was available for participants to 'test' during the presentations.

"Thanks to the generous support and funds raised from the event, the Northern Tablelands Koala Partnership project will be able to send two additional wildlife rescuers on a specialist koala rehabilitation course, further strengthening our local conservation efforts," said Matt.

"From educational events to novel research, the passion and commitment of our community continues to make a real difference," said Matt.

Through a range of projects and collaborations, the Northern Tablelands Koala Partnership is committed to protecting local koalas and their habitats.

The project is hard at work delivering a series of inspiring initiatives aimed at protecting and understanding our local koalas.

The Northern Tablelands Koala Partnership is supported by the NSW Government under the NSW Koala Strategy.



Welcome Thaw Zaw: New Koala Project Officer

Southern New England Landcare is delighted to welcome Thaw Ni Ni Zaw to the team as the new Northern Tablelands Koala Conservation Officer.

Originally from the dry zone region near Mandalay in Myanmar, Thaw Ni brings a rich and diverse background in agriculture, environmental science, and community-based conservation to the role.

"I've always been passionate about biodiversity and community-based conservation," says Thaw Ni.

"This role aligns perfectly with my background in agricultural and environmental science and my experience working with farmers and communities," she said.

Thaw Ni's academic journey began with a Bachelor of Agriculture and a Master of Horticulture from Yezin Agricultural University.

Her master's research explored the harvesting and use of traditional wild vegetables by isolated ethnic groups in Myanmar's mountainous regions.

Since 2016, Thaw Ni has worked on international agricultural research and extension projects led by the University of New England (UNE) and funded by the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR).

In her roles as Research Associate, Senior Research Associate, and later Project Coordinator, she led work in



Above: Matt Elsley doing a wonderful job of emcee at the Koala Konversations Event in March 2025.

Farewell & Thank You, Matt Elsley

Southern New England Landcare Ltd farewellled Matt Elsley from his role as Koala Conservation Project Officer in early July 2025, after two years of dedicated service.

During his time with us, Matt led a range of impactful initiatives and forged valuable partnerships that have greatly benefited koala conservation efforts across our region. His passion, professionalism, and collaborative spirit left a lasting impression on our team and community.

Matt has now taken on an exciting new role as Senior Conservation Planning Officer, North-West with the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water's Conservation Programs Heritage and Regulation Group – a testament to his expertise and commitment to environmental stewardship.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to Matt for his outstanding contributions and for ensuring a smooth handover to our new Project Officer, Thaw Zaw.

We wish Matt every success in his new role and look forward to seeing the continued impact of his work in conservation.



Above: Thaw Ni joined the Southern New England Landcare team in early July 2025.

Myanmar focused on rural livelihoods, farming systems, gender analysis, institutional capacity building, and participatory extension methods.

She also gained experience supporting livestock farmers in Indonesia.

In 2023, Thaw Ni was awarded an Australia Awards Scholarship to undertake a Master of Environmental Science and Management at UNE.

Her thesis, completed in May 2025, examined the cultural significance of Indigenous Australian plants in the Gwydir Wetlands.

No stranger to Landcare, Thaw Ni has been volunteering with Southern New England Landcare for the past 12 months, including fieldwork on koala conservation projects across the region.

In addition to her work with Landcare, Thaw Ni also volunteers at the N.C.W. Beadle Herbarium at UNE, building her expertise in plant identification and ecological monitoring.

Based in Armidale and applying for permanent residency, Thaw Ni is excited to contribute to koala conservation in the Northern Tablelands.

"I love the small-town atmosphere, the green spaces, and the national parks," she says.

"Landcare is a respected and trusted organisation, and I am proud to be part of it."

Thaw Ni's strong foundation in agricultural production systems, combined with her experience in environmental science and extension, will be an asset as she works with landholders, communities, and project partners to support koala conservation across our region.

Strengthening Local Capacity for Koala Care

The Northern Tablelands is home to one of New South Wales's most significant inland koala populations.

Unlike coastal populations, these koalas live at low densities, making them less visible but no less important.

The region's cool temperate forests are expected to become vital climate refuges as temperatures rise, making this landscape critical for the species' survival.

Despite this ecological impact, koalas remain under threat.

Listed as endangered in 2022, wild populations have declined by up to 60% in the past two decades.

Habitat loss, vehicle strikes, dog attacks, disease, and extreme weather events continue to impact local populations.

Another challenge is limited local expertise in the Northern Tablelands.

Sick and injured koalas often face transfers of up to six hours to coastal facilities such as Port Macquarie, Lismore or Byron Bay.

These journeys expose them to additional stress, reducing their chances of survival as they are removed from local food sources and forced into

warmer, humid climate while already vulnerable.

To address this critical gap, Southern New England Landcare has taken a proactive role in strengthening local veterinary and wildlife care capacity across the region.

Professional Veterinary Training

Southern New England Landcare successfully delivered the first professional veterinary training course focused on koala health in the Northern Tablelands.

Held on 25–26 August 2025 at University of New England, the course brought together 19 veterinarians from across the region to strengthen their skills in koala-specific medical care combining classroom teaching with practical, hands-on sessions.

"It forms part of a broader initiative to improve wildlife healthcare in the Northern Tablelands," said Thaw.

"Koalas require highly specialised veterinary care during rehabilitation," said Astrid Aggelen, trainer from Koala Conservation Australia.

Below: Local veterinarians gaining hands-on experience at the University of New England. L-R Ashleigh Smith, Astrid Aggelen, Sarah Bailey, Renee Willis, Sarah Radford, and Elsa Willis.



“Local veterinarians face challenges because koala care requires specific veterinary and rehabilitation training, that is not included in standard veterinary medical curriculum,” she said.

To address this gap, Southern New England Landcare coordinated the intensive workshop, empowering local veterinarians to assess, treat, and manage koalas more effectively.

The course covered specialised diagnostic and treatment techniques, enabling local vets to use immediately in local clinics.

“By providing local vets with targeted medical training, we can improve koala welfare, increase positive outcomes, decrease costs, and reduce the need for long-distance transfers,” said Astrid.

Reducing long-distance transfers improves welfare outcomes and gives koalas a better chance at survival.

Participants described the training as invaluable, both for its technical content and the opportunity to connect with colleagues across the region.

“It was an excellent opportunity to build our local capacity,” she said.

The course was coordinated by Southern New England Landcare, hosted by the University of New England and delivered by Koala Conservation Australia.

Supporting Wildlife Carers

Alongside veterinary training, Southern New England Landcare has also supported local wildlife carers, the frontline responders when koalas are found injured, sick, or displaced.

Wildlife carers are the essential link between rescue and veterinary care, and their skills are critical in stabilising koalas before treatment.

In June and August 2025, carers from the Northern Tablelands Wildlife Carers (NTWC) and WIRES attended wildlife rehabilitator course at the Koala Hospital in Port Macquarie.

Delivered by KCA, the program combined online modules with two days of intensive practical sessions covering diagnosis, handling, feeding, habitat preparation, and shelter construction.

Participants also received the Koala Rehabilitation Manual, a valuable resource they can use and share within their networks.

This training is about building a resilient, skilled, and collaborative community of carers in the Northern Tablelands.

By strengthening both veterinary and carer capacity, we create a local support system that can respond more effectively to the needs of our koalas.

Working Together for Koalas

Together, the training programs highlight the importance of regional collaboration in protecting one of Australia’s most treasured native animals.

By empowering local vets, carers, and community networks, the Northern Tablelands is taking important steps to secure a future for koalas and the ecosystems they depend on.

These initiatives were funded by Southern New England Landcare’s 2025 Koala Community Capacity Project, supported by the 2022-2026 Northern Tablelands Regional Partnership, and funded by the NSW Koala Strategy through the NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW).



Below: Wildlife carers from WIRES upskilling at the Koala Hospital in Port Macquarie.



Boosting Koala Habitat Conservation Across the Northern Tablelands

This year, Southern New England Landcare distributed Koala Habitat Conservation and Restoration funding from Northern Tablelands Local Land Services (NTLLS) and the NSW Department of Climate Change, Environment, Energy & Water (DCCEEW).

Though koala-focused, the funding has enhanced wildlife habitat across the region, benefiting birds, butterflies, bees, wasps, and microbats — all vital for pollination and pest control in agriculture.

Healthy bushland ecosystems also improve farm productivity and resilience to extreme weather.

Working with private landholders, NPWS, NSW Crown Lands, CSIRO, and UNE, we secured Landholder Management Agreements that:

- Protected 937 ha of existing koala habitat
- Created 88 ha of new habitat through the planting of 49,000 koala habitat seedlings.

Using DCCEEW's Koala Habitat Prioritisation map and innovative strategies, we improved conservation outcomes and funding efficiency.

Our 2024–2025 DCCEEW funding was tripled from the usual \$50,000, allowing us to support nearly all eligible Expressions of Interest.

A key project area included a forested property which missed out on being funded by the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust, now fitted with wildlife-friendly fencing for rotational grazing and conservation.

Another property began a large-scale bush regeneration project, including pest and weed control, and a planned cool burn in collaboration with local Aboriginal organisations and Local Land Services.

Also funded were non-traditional restoration activities, such as conservation work on CSIRO's 'Chiswick' property, habitat restoration at NPWS's Boorolong Nature Reserve, and an



Above: Volunteers assist Armidale Tree Group to plant koala feed trees into this existing remnant at Acacia Park near Armidale to improve habitat for koalas.

Below: Volunteers assisted with a planting near Invergowrie.



extension of a conservation area at the University of New England.

Community involvement has been strong, with several volunteer tree plantings hosted in partnership with Armidale Tree Group (ATG).

We're grateful for this support and look forward to continuing our work with members, ATG, and the broader community.

For more information, please contact Thaw Zaw or Janeen Robb at the office on (02) 6772 9123.



Thunderbolt Country Reconnected

Southern New England Landcare Ltd is proud to announce the success of its project, Reconnecting Thunderbolt Country for Threatened Woodland Birds, funded by the NSW Environmental Trust.

The initiative aimed to restore habitat connectivity and support biodiversity across the Uralla, Kentucky, and Salisbury Plains areas of the Southern New England region.

The project addressed the urgent need to protect and restore habitat for 19 threatened fauna and 7 threatened plant species, whose survival and movement have been compromised by habitat loss and fragmentation.

Through collaboration with local graziers and landholders, the project:

- Closed a 25 km habitat gap between Oxley Wild Rivers National Park and Racecourse Lagoon
- Protected 24 ha of remnant woodland and wetland
- Restored 33 ha of farmland with 11,000 native seedlings.

Monitoring conducted between 2020 and 2022 recorded 5,148 birds across woodland and wetland sites, including species of local and national conservation significance such as the Satin Flycatcher, Eastern Yellow Robin, and Blue-billed Duck.

“This project demonstrates that targeted restoration in fragmented landscapes can successfully re-establish functional habitat for threatened species,” said Struan Ferguson, Project Coordinator.

The initiative provided educational opportunities to build landholder capacity in managing threats and conserving biodiversity.

Restoration efforts were guided by ecological data and prioritisation mapping to ensure long-term conservation outcomes.

Southern New England Landcare thanks all participating landholders and partners for their commitment to protecting the region’s unique biodiversity.

Helping Vulnerable Groups Stay Safe Online

Senior Citizens were the key beneficiaries of a ‘Click with Confidence’ cyber security workshop series hosted by Southern New England Landcare and the New England Community College in the second half of 2025

Designed to boost confidence and safety when using the internet this free workshop included a short talk, morning tea, and one-on-one help with devices.

“‘Click with Confidence’ was designed to provide some of our most vulnerable groups with added safety and security online,” said Elizabeth Rosser, Local Landcare Coordinator with Southern New England Landcare.

“Participants learned practical skills such as setting up multifactor identification, keeping software up to date, creating strong and unique passphrases, and recognising and reporting phishing scams,” said Elizabeth.

“Held across four locations from September to December 2025, the sessions were tailored for anyone who would like to feel more confident with the increasing requirement to be connected online and aims to make online safety simple and accessible,” she said.

Southern New England Landcare received funding through the ‘Act Now, Stay Secure’ program being rolled out by the Australian Government.

“Thank you to the New England Community College, who have been instrumental in designing these workshops,” said Elizabeth.

“New England Community College provide a valuable service to the community, and Southern New England Landcare are pleased to be working with them to deliver this initiative,” she said.

Further workshops will be held in the first half of 2026, with at least one specifically designed for youth.

For more information, keep an eye on the eNews and our website www.snelandcare.org.au.

New Ways to Give: Opening a Door to Philanthropic Support

Southern New England Landcare now has a presence on the GiveNow platform, making contributions from donors easier than ever before.

CEO, Karen Zirkler said, “We’ve operated almost solely on grants in the past, but during it’s 2025 strategic planning work, the board decided it’s time to tap into philanthropic giving as a means of funding some of the important work we do.”

“Our first trial of the platform is for our ‘Koala Kits for Kids’ cause,” said Karen.

“This cause aims to raise \$5000 so our Koala Conservation Project Officer can develop educational resources and use them with children in the classroom and at special events,” she said.

“We also know that one of the fastest growing ways of giving is through bequests in wills, so we encourage folks to think about giving to the Southern New England Landcare Gift Fund, which is also on our GiveNow profile,” she said.

The GiveNow platform has been operating for more than 20 years, and now supports more than 6000 community organisations across Australia, with more than \$230 million raised for those organisations from donors.

“This is an impressive track record, and Southern New England Landcare is very pleased to be partnering with GiveNow,” said Karen.

For more information, Southern New England Landcare encourages potential donors to review its charity status with the ACNC, or its policy on Acceptance and Management of Gifts and Bequests at www.snelandcare.org.au.



Southern New England Landcare Ltd | LANDCHAT

May Member Muster: Kerrie Saunders on Native Grains

Southern New England Landcare hosted its May Member Muster on Wednesday, 16 May 2025, bringing together 25 Landcare group representatives, members, and guests for an evening of learning and connection.

The highlight of the event was guest speaker Kerrie Saunders, a Gomeroi/Guumbraay woman from Moree, who shared her knowledge of native grain cultivation, harvesting, and milling.

Kerrie, a respected cultural educator and community leader, spoke about her life and her work through *Yinarrma*, meaning “Women of Known Information” in Gomeroi language.

Her presentation explored initiatives that blend cultural heritage with sustainable agriculture, including native food tours along the Mehi River and the production of native grain flour.

Kerrie discussed the challenges of harvesting native grains, their health benefits, and the growing demand for these products in modern markets.

Beyond Kerrie’s inspiring talk, the Muster featured the traditional “Around Our Groups” session, where members shared updates, exchanged ideas, and explored current opportunities.

The evening concluded with a relaxed supper, fostering collaboration and strengthening community ties.

This event was proudly supported by the Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal (FRRR) through the Australian Government’s Future Drought Fund, and made possible by the NSW Landcare Enabling Program—a partnership between Local Land Services and Landcare NSW, supported by the NSW Government.

Below: Kerrie Saunders presenting at the May Member Muster.



November Member Muster: Koalas

The latest Member Muster was held on 12th November in Uralla and gathered 26 members and friends from around the region.

Guest speaker

Thaw Ni Ni Zaw, SNEL’s Koala Conservation Project Officer, was our guest speaker at the event.

Thaw presented on the success of the Northern Tablelands Koala Partnership Projects, which have spanned more than six years.

Her presentation highlighted the collaborative efforts across the region to protect and restore koala habitat, engage landholders, and build capacity for koala care and rehabilitation.

“The series of koala projects has really highlighted the power of a community and a region to work together for the greater good of a species,” said CEO Karen Zirkler.

“We were excited to hear from Thaw, who collated all the highlights of the program to share with our members.”

Members were updated on:

- Habitat restoration efforts by landholders in the Armidale Region of Koala Significance
- Training programs for veterinarians and vet nurses focused on koala rehabilitation
- Plans for a new koala and wildlife hospital in partnership with the University of New England.

Around our groups

The November Member Muster also featured updates from local Landcare groups - see page 21 for the roundup.

Awards presentations

The event finished by celebrating two worthy award winners:

- Mr Bryan Johnston as the recipient of the 2025 John Winter Irving Bequest (see page 1 for full story)
- Em Prof Nick Reid as the recipient of the 2025 Coordinator’s Choice Award (story this page).

“These awards are a way of recognising and appreciating those locals who have made a significant contribution to Landcare in our region,” said Karen Zirkler, CEO.

Staff Honour Nick Reid with 2025 Coordinator’s Choice Award

Southern New England Landcare’s staff proudly presented the 2025 Coordinator’s Choice Award to Emeritus Professor Nick Reid, Chair of the Board, at the November Member Muster.

This annual award, affectionately described as “recognising support and commitment to Coordinator sanity,” is made by staff.

Since its inception in 2000, it has celebrated those who go above and beyond in assisting the staff to support the organisation’s members.

“We chose Nick for his unwavering support and encouragement of staff, and his leadership in strengthening the governance, professionalism, and capability of our board,” said CEO Karen Zirkler.

“His thoughtful approach and dedication to building a skilled and future-ready board have made a lasting impact on our organisation and the effectiveness of our team.”

Under Nick’s guidance, Southern New England Landcare has conducted board skills audits, adopted a new membership policy to allow for skills-based appointments, and welcomed directors with expertise in first nations experience, legal, financial, and strategic areas — all contributing to a stronger governance framework.

The staff team congratulates Nick and thanks him for his continued commitment to Landcare and the broader community.

Below: Nick Reid accepting the Coordinator’s Choice Award.



2025 Chair's Report to the AGM

Southern New England Landcare Ltd held its 24th Annual General Meeting during November, marking nearly a quarter-century of community-driven environmental stewardship.

The chair, Em Prof Nick Reid, presented the following report to the AGM:

"The 2024–2025 financial year saw Southern New England Landcare Ltd continue to make meaningful contributions to the health and wellbeing of our region. We remain committed to our vision and mission and we worked diligently to advance our four strategic objectives.

An infographic summarising our achievements against the Plan Objectives is available in the business papers. My report expands on the highlights in more detail.

Build and Service Our Networks

Our network of Landcare groups remained steady at 29, while membership grew by 84 (more than 15%), bringing our total to 592 members at 30 June 2025.

We supported members with 27 editions of our fortnightly e-News delivered to their In-boxes, sharing a broad range of opportunities and events. Our social media presence grew, with Facebook followers increasing by 90 to a total of 1,303. We've also launched a SNEL LinkedIn profile and we would like to encourage everyone to connect with us there.

Our annual Landchat newsletter, circulated in November 2024, showcased the 2024 calendar year's achievements in detail. Our 2025 edition of Landchat will be available at the end of this month.

We maintained active relationships with 52 partner organisations — an increase of four over the 2024 financial year.

Enable Innovative Regenerative Initiatives for Environment, Agriculture & Communities

In 2024–25, SNEL delivered 77 contracted milestones across 13 projects aligned with our strategic objective to foster innovation in environmental, agricultural and community regeneration.

We coordinated 22 events, including two Member Musters. In November 2024, we welcomed Warren Davies, "The Unbreakable Farmer," a leading advocate for rural mental health. In May 2025, we heard from Kerrie Saunders, a Gomerioi/Guumbraay woman and cultural educator from Moree.

These events reached and upskilled 534 participants — a 15% increase from 468 the previous year.

The NSW Government's Landcare Enabling Program 2023–2027 continues to be a cornerstone project, allowing us to employ 1.75 FTE Local Landcare Coordinators — Struan Ferguson and Elizabeth Rosser — who have significantly expanded our capacity to support members. Their work has included securing and delivering smaller grants, hosting events focused on resilience, mental health and cyber security, and facilitating action planning sessions that are revitalising group activity and membership.

The Northern Tablelands Koala Partnership Project, led by Matt Elsley and supported by Janeen Robb, achieved strong on-ground and capacity-building outcomes. In July 2025, we welcomed Thaw Ni Ni Zaw as our new Koala Conservation Project Officer following Matt's departure to pursue his dream role in threatened species conservation with the NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water. Thaw will share more about the Koala Partnership Project's achievements, to date, during tonight's Member Muster.

Provide Financial Security for the Organisation

During the financial year, SNEL and its groups submitted eight new grant applications — a marked decrease (73%) in number but a 300% increase in total value, amounting to \$3,881,871. At 30 June, one application was successful, three were unsuccessful, and four were pending.

The successful grant was submitted by Uralla Rivercare Group through the Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal and is called Water Resilience & Sustainable Management for Homes & Villages. Focusing on urban and peri-urban areas, the project responds to increasing challenges around water security, runoff, and climate resilience.

With the guidance of sustainability expert Jerry Coleby-Williams from ABC's Gardening Australia, participants will explore practical approaches to rainwater harvesting, stormwater infiltration, greywater recycling, and soil improvement.

In March 2025, we held our annual strategic planning workshop, facilitated by Dr Julian Prior, a long-time supporter of Landcare in our region. The plan was refreshed and will soon be available on our website.

In April 2025, the board established the Southern New England Landcare Risk Committee to strengthen organisational resilience. Richard Evans, a Uralla resident, joined the CEO and directors on the committee. Richard worked in risk management in local government and insurance throughout his career. Our Risk Committee held its first meeting in April, with the second meeting scheduled for next week.

In June and July, we relocated to new premises at Unit 4, 121 Allingham Street, Armidale. Having outgrown our Hanna's Arcade offices, we chose not to renew the lease. Staff are very happy with the purpose-built space with its dedicated offices, open plan work spaces, board room, storage areas, bathrooms and kitchen.

In June and July, SNEL experienced two cybersecurity incidents. These prompted swift action from the CEO, staff, board and IT consultants to investigate, secure systems and deliver cybersecurity training. A cybersecurity policy is in place, and the board is considering cybersecurity insurance. SNEL and our staff did not lose any money as a result of the attacks.

Our 2024–25 financials were audited by Roberts + Morrow, Armidale, with a positive outcome and no adverse findings. As the auditor noted, "They are a very 'boring' set of financial reports", reassuring us that everything is in order.

Roberts + Morrow also audit Landcare NSW's annual finances, so our auditors are fully informed not only about the nature of our business but also the operations of the state organisation, the strengths and weaknesses of our business model, and the Landcare Enabling Program delivered through Landcare NSW.

Build and Maintain Team Capacity

Our organisation was governed by a dedicated board of volunteer directors, who met six times throughout the year in a mix of in-person and online meetings. Eight directors finish their annual terms at this meeting, with an average of six directors attending board meetings since July 2024.

In November 2024, we said goodbye to Sara Schmude, Natural Capital Project Manager with Impact Ag Australia. Sara was a director with SNEL for 12 months. However, she continues to advise us about the rapid evolution of natural capital markets, in which she plays a decisive role in both Australia and the US.

We welcomed two new skills-based

directors in the past 12 months:

- Dr Brooke Kennedy, a Gomeroi yinarr (Kamilaroi Woman), is a senior lecturer at the University of New England, a Uralla resident, and a specialist in canid and felid biology, ecology and behaviour. Brooke joined the board in November 2024, bringing valuable First Nations knowledge and experience.
- Mr Robert Sieben joined us in August 2025. He brings over 40 years of expertise in IT, business management, HR, fundraising, marketing and governance. Rob lives in Adelaide and so will be joining us online most of the time.

Staff and board members participated in at least eight professional development opportunities during the year, covering governance, financial management, leadership, cybersecurity, philanthropic engagement, and the potential of natural capital as an income-generating opportunity for SNEL.

Acknowledgements

2024–25 has been a productive and rewarding year, despite the inevitable challenges. The highlights featured in Landchat #124 speak volumes about the dedication of our team – you can look forward to the year’s highlights in your letterbox in late November.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to our staff. To CEO, Karen Zirkler, in particular, whom we are very lucky to have and who makes my life as chair of the board easy!

I would also like to thank the rest of our great team: Struan Ferguson, Beth Rosser, Matt Elsley, Thaw Zaw, Janet Hodge, Janeen Robb and our bookkeeper, Amanda Fenwicke.

Thank you also to my fellow board members over the past 18 months: vice-chair David Steller, treasurer Bev Stubberfield, and Bryan Johnston, Peter Metcalfe, Steve Harvey, Sara Schmude, Dr Brooke Kennedy, and most recently, Rob Sieben.

And a special thanks to Peter Metcalfe, who, after joining the board at the 2013 AGM has spent the last 12 years supporting the organisation in a voluntary capacity as a director. Peter has not re-nominated as a board member in 2025–26. We very much appreciate his input, involvement, wisdom and contributions over such a long period of time. We wish him and Sue all the best for the future and hope they won’t be strangers. And a tip: if you ever get the chance to sit with him in the late afternoon and watch all the small to medium-sized woodland birds coming into drink, feed and bathe on his patio, it is one of the region’s great ecotourism experiences you will ever enjoy!

ACHIEVEMENTS AGAINST OUR STRATEGIC PLAN OBJECTIVES


July 2024- June 2025






Build & service our networks

- 29 Landcare Groups
- 84 New Members for a Total 592 Members
- 27 eNews, ▼ from 29 last year
- 1303 Facebook Followers, ▲ from 1213 last year
- 1 Annual Landchat Newsletter



Enable innovative regenerative initiatives for environment, agriculture & communities

- 77 Milestones Achieved under 13 Projects
- 49 Partner Organisations, ▲ from 48 last year
- 22 Events, ▼ from 23 last year
- 534 Event Participants, ▲ from 468



Provide financial security for the organisation

- 8 New grant submissions worth \$3,881,871
- 1 Grant secured (0.9% of \$ requested)
- 4 Grants to be determined (11.5% of \$ requested)
- Successful Annual Audit



Build & maintain team capacity

- 7 Volunteer Directors
- 7 Part-Time Staff Members
- 6 Board Meetings
- 8 Training Opportunities for Board & Staff

Our mission is to lead, connect and enable our communities to reach their sustainability goals in a changing environment.

Read more on news and projects at www.snelandcare.org.au

Finally, thank you to you, our group representatives and members. Without you, Southern New England Landcare would not exist.”

New Office & New Board Member!

121 Allingham Street

Southern New England Landcare has officially moved into a fresh, spacious new office in Armidale — and the team couldn't be more thrilled!

On 28th July 2025, the organisation relocated from its long-time base at Hanna's Arcade to Unit 4, 121 Allingham Street, marking a new chapter in its journey of growth and community service.

"Our team has grown, and so has our need for space," said CEO Karen Zirkler.

"We were bursting at the seams in our old location, and it was time to find a place that could truly support our work and our members."

After a whirlwind few weeks of packing, shifting, and settling in, the new premises are now fully operational — and they're a perfect fit.

The office features wheelchair accessibility; a boardroom for 10; desk space for up to 12 staff; a welcoming reception area; a kitchen, bathroom, and storage facilities; off-street staff parking and secure work vehicle space; and plenty of street parking for visitors.

"We're just across the road from the Armidale Library and close to shops, which makes catering and errands a breeze," Karen added.

"And best of all, our meeting room is available free of charge to member groups — it's a space for collaboration and connection."

Southern New England Landcare spent eight years at Hanna's Arcade, and the team extends heartfelt thanks to the management there for their support.

"Now, we're excited to welcome members and visitors to our new home — come and see us!" said Karen.

Welcome Rob Sieben

Southern New England Landcare Ltd is pleased to announce the appointment of independent board member Mr Robert (Rob) Sieben to its Board of Directors, significantly enhancing its collective skillset.

Mr Sieben was appointed at the Board's meeting on 13 August 2025 and brings over 40 years of experience in information technology, business management, human resources, fundraising, marketing, and governance.

He holds a Bachelor of Science, Diploma of Education, and a Master of Education (Educational Administration).

"Rob's long and distinguished career across publicly listed and private enterprises, combined with his senior executive and governance experience, is highly relevant to Southern New England Landcare," said Board Chair Emeritus Professor Nick Reid.



Above: Mr Robert Sieben joined the Southern New England Landcare board in August 2025.

Mr Sieben expressed his enthusiasm for joining the organisation:

"Having recently retired, I'm keen to apply the skills I've developed in education and business to support a community-based not-for-profit like Southern New England Landcare."

Recent skills audits identified gaps in legal and financial expertise among the board.

In response, a new membership policy adopted in August 2024 allows for up to four of the maximum ten directors to be appointed based on specific skills, ensuring the board has access to high-level expertise in its governance and decision-making processes.

Mr Sieben's most recent role was Operations Manager and Senior Education Consultant with Hutton Consulting Australia, a specialist in educational leadership.

He is an accredited trainer for the Department of Child Protection's Child Safe Environments program, and a recipient of the ACEL National Fellowship Award for outstanding contributions to educational leadership.

He has also served as Secretary of the SA State Executive of the Australian Council for Educational Leaders, and Treasurer of the board of Educators SA (CEASA).

Although based in South Australia, Mr Sieben will actively participate in board activities through modern telecommunications.

Southern New England Landcare is delighted to welcome Rob to the team and looks forward to the valuable contributions he will bring.

Below: The new office space played host to delegates from the Philippines (front row) interested in extension methods we use to successfully engage communities. L-R Keith Walker, Thaw Zaw, Roby Pagong, Dr Julian Prior, Karen Zirkler and Diana Cabello.



Risk Committee Launched to Strengthen Governance

In a significant step toward enhancing organisational resilience, Southern New England Landcare held the inaugural meeting of its Risk Committee in July 2025.

Previously, risk-related matters were managed directly by the Board of Directors.

The establishment of the Risk Committee marks a strategic evolution in governance, ensuring that risk oversight is more focused, proactive, and aligned with the organisation's growing needs.

"This committee is a vital part of our governance framework," said CEO Karen Zirkler.

"It allows us to better identify, assess, and manage risks that could impact our mission and operations."

The Risk Committee is tasked with overseeing the organisation's risk management framework and ensuring that policies and strategies meet both regulatory requirements and Southern New England Landcare's objectives.

The committee comprises a diverse mix of expertise: Nick Reid (Director), David Steller (Director), Richard Evans (Independent Member), Beth Rosser (Staff), Thaw Zaw (Staff Alternate).

Meeting twice yearly, the committee will report to the Board on key areas:

- Reviewing the risk management framework
- Monitoring of operational, financial, cyber security, regulatory, governance, and reputational risks
- Assessing and adjusting risk appetite
- Complying with risk-related regulations
- Evaluating mitigation strategies and controls
- Response planning for emerging risks.

"We're committed to building a culture of awareness and preparedness, and this committee ensures we're not just reacting to risks, but anticipating and managing them with confidence," said Karen.

November 2025 Member Muster - Highlights from Around Our Groups -

Our Landcare group representatives shared their group's inspiring activities, achievements, and plans for the future during the November Member Muster in Uralla.

It was inspiring to see the diversity of projects and the passion driving our community forward.

Arding Landcare Inc

- Planted 500 trees and managed storm impacts.
- Working with Uralla Shire Council to hand over the reserve.
- Considering becoming a sub-group under SNEL.

Armidale Tree Group Inc

- Celebrating 42 years!
- Two koala habitat grants are now fully planted—40 hectares.
- Working with solar farms to establish biodiversity offsets and screening plantings.
- Ran a quoll workshop.
- Participated in the New England Garden Festival and Black Gully Festival.
- Looking forward to opening the Mike O'Keef woodland footbridge.

Armidale Urban Rivercare Group

- Planted 1000 seedlings sponsored by Essential Energy in collaboration with Armidale Tree Group.
- Winter wildlife sightings: a Buff-Banded Rail, a possible platypus, and water rats.
- Arranged a creeklands tour for councillors to raise awareness.

Dangarsleigh Landcare

- Koala plantings continue.
- Facing challenges with nodding thistles and escalating wild dog issues near the gorge country.

Dumaresq Landcare

- Koala plantings along Dumaresq Dam, Boorolong Road, Claremont Road, and private properties.

Friends of Angophora Bushland

- New group rep, Nick Reid.

- Concern about fallen branches and fire risk in the reserve.
- Planning to meet with neighbours to revisit management strategies.

Friends of Black Gully

- Held the 14th Black Gully Festival in November with 2500 participants, inspiring workshops.
- 40 new group members.

Harnham Landcare Group

- Gordon Williams hosted Uralla Central School for an Ag and Science day and has fenced Mihi Creek to protect riparian zones.
- Several members attended the CSIRO Sustainable Chiswick Day.
- Held an action planning session.
- Going into recess until younger members join.

Retreat Landcare Network

- Enjoyed a Warraba National Park walk with plant identification by Peter Metcalfe
- Ran group action planning, which sparked new activities.
- Most members new to Landcare.
- Next meeting aims to strengthen community connections.

Uralla Rivercare Group

- Group refreshed after action planning.
- Replanting old sites near Porter Park.
- Secured \$20,000 grant to host workshops with Jerry Colbey-Williams from ABC's *Gardening Australia*.
- Special thanks to Beth Rosser for grant support.

SNEL thanks all our groups for sharing their stories and for the incredible work they do in caring for our landscapes and communities.

These updates remind us of the strength and creativity within our network and we look forward to supporting your efforts and celebrating more successes together in the year ahead!

2025 National Landcare Conference

By Struan Ferguson

Local and Regional Landcare Coordinators, group and committee volunteers from all over Australia gathered for the National Landcare Conference 22-24th September at the Gold Coast.

The conference was attended by SNEL staff members Struan Ferguson, Elizabeth Rosser, Thaw Zaw and Karen Zirkler, as well as SNEL chair, Nick Reid.

Landscape architect and TV presenter, Costa Georgiadis, was the charismatic Master of Ceremonies.

Costa has a passion for plants, people and bringing them together. He kept proceedings moving along with good humour, deep thinking and thought-provoking questions.

The Welcome to Country was performed by Justine Dillon, a Kombumerri Quandamooka woman/Traditional Owner and the Kombumerri dance troupe.

Opening addresses were heard from Federal Ministers, Senator the Hon Murray Watt, Environment and Water, The Hon Julie Collins MP, Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Counsellor Mark Hammel Deputy Mayor of the Gold Coast, and Landcare Australia Chairman Doug Humann AM.

The Conference presented a diverse line-up of speakers - leaders, innovators, and changemakers from all walks of life who are shaping the future of sustainable land management and environmental conservation.

Keynote, plenary and concurrent stream speakers covered numerous topics including nature repair markets, climate adaptation, innovation, technology, community-driven Landcare, mental health, wellbeing, restoring biodiversity, sustainable agriculture, soil health and much more.

From grassroots volunteers to renowned scientists, Indigenous custodians to agricultural pioneers, speakers reflected the depth and breadth of the Landcare in Australia.

Highlights included:

- *Fiona Simson*, Oceania representative and Vice President of the World Farmers' Organisation, said we need "the best information communicated in the most understandable way."

- *Toni Hay*, Director, Indigenous Climate Change said, "Traditional (aboriginal) knowledge is very important for climate adaptation" and "get to know the risks in your area – triggers for adaptation plus action plus traditional knowledge."
- Hearing Aboriginal women's perspectives from *Natalie Sommerville*, President, Australian Women in Agriculture and Board Director, Landcare Australia, *Jocelyn King*, CEO and Founder, First Australians Capital and operator of Djanaba Farm and *Sam Murray*, CEO, Indigenous Desert Alliance.
- *Dr Alison Southwell*, CEO, Holbrook Landcare Network said, "Carbon Farming is good farming – good for business, resilience and people's mental health."
- *Andrew Walker*, CEO and co-founder, AirSeed, on the development of Grovia, a comprehensive platform which streamlines land rehabilitation, offering automated species selection, optimised planting plans and data driven insights for efficient project management and delivery. Andrew said, "Grovia can assist land managers explore potential carbon project possibilities to support decision making."
- *Darryl Lyons*, co-Founder and Chief Rainmaker, Rainstick. Rainstick, by combining ancient wisdom with modern technology, has developed Variable Electric Field Treatment (VEFt), a seed treatment technology (inspired by thunderstorms) to increase crop yields and resilience to changes in climate conditions. He said, "Studies show VEFt increases nitrogen uptake, 20-25% more carbon in roots, and stimulates efficient nutrient uptake."
- The Bob Hawke Landcare Award, won by *Holbrook Landcare Network*, NSW, is a prestigious national award that publicly recognises an individual, group or organisation that has been involved in championing landcare and inspiring others to take action on their property or in their community.
- The General Jeffrey Soil Health Award, won by *Dr Susan Orgill*, ACT, honours the remarkable work done by Australia's first National Soils Advocate, former Governor General, Major General the Hon. Michael Jeffery, AC, AO (Mil), CVO, MC (Retd) and perpetuates his legacy.
- The 2025 Women in Landcare Award went to *Nel Chaffey*, from Tamworth Regional Landcare Association.

To read more about winners of the National Landcare awards see: <https://snelandcare.org.au/landcare-news/latest-news/2229-tamworth-local-wins-national-women-in-landcare-award.html>

Fantastic Field Trips

The NELN and SNEL contingent participated in the following field trips:

Broadwater Discovery & Habitat Restoration Walk and Boat Tour - a guided tour of the Gold Coast's beautiful Broadwater and walked through Federation Walk, one of the region's largest and most important coastal reserves.

Nerang Catchment Connections: Land, Water and Community - a visit to a powerful community-driven initiative led by the Numinbah Valley Environment Education Centre P&C and the SEQ Water Source Protection Program delivered by Watergum Community Inc, where we saw firsthand riparian restoration, cattle management, and landslip mitigation.

Farms for the Future: Exploring Biodiversity and Regeneration in the Tweed Valley - we visited landholders who are working to protect and connect fragmented habitats as part of 'Tweed Landcare's Filling the Biodiversity Gaps' project, and seeing farms implementing regenerative farming practices with support from Tweed Shire Council's Sustainable Agriculture Program.

It was a big few days and very much enjoyed by everyone who attended.

Landcare Awards

The 2025 National Landcare Awards Dinner celebrated the wonderful work of Landcarers across Australia.

The winners of all nine National Landcare Award categories, the 2025 Bob Hawke Landcare Award and the 2025 General Jeffrey Soil Health Award were announced.

Southern New England Landcare congratulates all National Landcare Award winners, particularly:

New England Landcare Network

New England Landcare Network (NELN) achieved a range of key milestones aimed at supporting its member networks during the 2024-2025 financial year.

New England Landcare Network Inc (NELN) is a regional support network for four member networks: Southern New England Landcare, Glenrac at Glen Innes, Gwymac at Inverell and Granite Borders Landcare Committee at Tenterfield.

NELN employs a full time Regional Landcare Coordinator (RLC), Keith Walker, and a half time Regional Admin Support Officer (RASO), currently Shelomi Doyle.

Based in Armidale, they support the Landcare networks of the Northern Tablelands.

2025 Landcare Adventure

The New England & North West Landcare Adventure was held at Inverell in early March 2025. Developed and delivered by the region's four Landcare networks, it attracted more than 100 participants for two days of workshops, presentations, an amazing dinner dance at Danthonia, and field visits looking at environmental and water management topics.

This event is a great example of collaboration and teamwork from regional Landcare networks.

Renewal in Tenterfield

NELN staff and executive committee volunteers worked with Granite Borders Landcare Committee on a renewal process involving two facilitated governance workshops led by Julia Spicer from Engage and Create Consulting.

As a result, more than 60 people attended their annual general meeting, and a management committee comprising 11 community members was formed.

Program mid term review

RLC Keith Walker attended a Landcare Enabling Program 2023 – 2027 Mid-Term Review process in Sydney aimed

at analysing program challenges and opportunities.

All program host organisations were represented, and a report was generated for the Joint Management Committee and the Natural Resources Commission.

Sustaining Landcare long-term

Keith has been actively involved in a state-wide community of practice called Leveraging for Self-Sustenance in Landcare.

This group are considering ways to enhance financial stability of the region's Landcare networks through possible business development options.

The range of business activities aligned to Landcare function in NSW is diverse and informative for NELN.

To this end, Keith submitted grant applications worth \$6M during the year.

He recently applied for \$2M in a consortium focused on rehydrating landscapes.

Future grants from Landcare NSW will focus on supporting innovation, partnerships, and Aboriginal engagement programs.

RASO role

Our RASO continues to liaise with NELN's member networks and assisted them to complete financial reporting for the Landcare Enabling Program financial year on time.

Maternity leave for Kate McLinton

Kate McLinton (RASO) took maternity leave during October, and has welcomed an adorable baby girl.

Welcome Shelomi Doyle

During Kate's maternity leave period, NELN welcomed Shelomi Doyle to the position.

Shelomi has a broad skillset and she looks forward to working with our member Landcare networks.



Above: Shelomi Doyle, Regional Admin Support Officer with NELN Inc.



Above: Landcare Adventure participants inspect a soil pit on 'Danthonia' where planned grazing and landscape rehydration has been practiced for several years.



Above: Landcare Adventure participants inspect a Mulloon Institute rehydration project near Inverell.

Below: Representatives from around NSW workshop the Landcare Enabling Program mid-term review in Sydney.



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Landchat presents a forum for the expression of a range of opinions. While every effort is made to publish accurate information, Southern New England Landcare Ltd and its employees do not accept responsibility for statements made and opinions expressed in this newsletter.

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