



WICCNews

WICC Newsletter August - September 2020



Djilba

Season of conception
Transitional time of year, flowers starting



Mardo on Nullaki Peninsula - Photograph by Craig Carter

Farmer in focus





Scotsdale farmer Marino Bocuzzi

"The water is crystal clear, it has made a real difference"

WICC caught up with Scotsdale cattle farmer, Marino Bocuzzi, who recently approached Wilson Inlet Catchment Committee regarding his concerns for a perennial creek which feeds the Denmark River. His cattle had unrestricted access to the creek. The understory had disappeared and the once free flowing creek had become a muddy mess. Using Regional Estuaries Initiative funding we constructed an alternative water point, stock crossing and fencing which excluded the stock from the creek. Following extensive site preparation we revegetated approximately 10 metres either side of the creek. All seedlings were grown from locally collected seed and were selected to minimise erosion and strip nutrients. Marino was particularly concerned about increasing the risk of fire by planting out the creek so we selected natives with low oil content. Ranging in age from 2 to 72, a team of 30 community volunteers planted out the creek with 5500 seedlings following a customised revegetation plan. The volunteers will be following the progress of their efforts with annual photos from established photo points.

"These days the public is expecting farmers to be doing the right thing. It is called social license... We are primary producers and we want the public to know that we are trying to do the right thing by the environment."

[Listen to the whole interview HERE](#)





New cattle crossing over creek



Community volunteer separating shrubs & trees



Jill & Brad Kneebone



Mark Parre

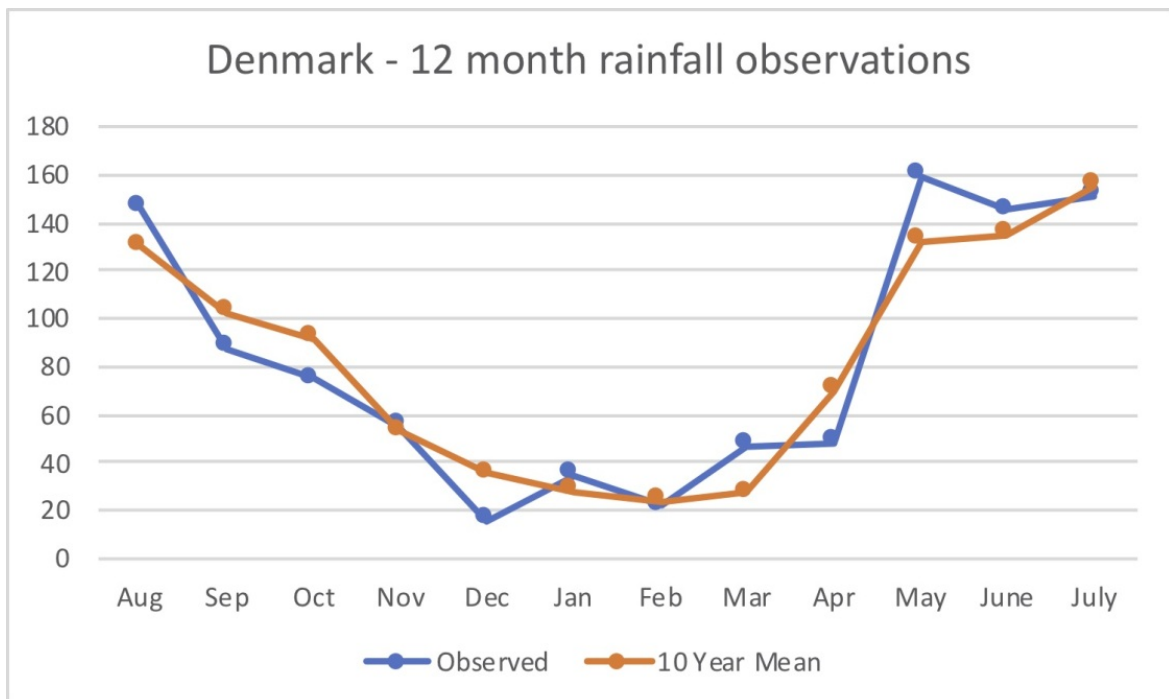
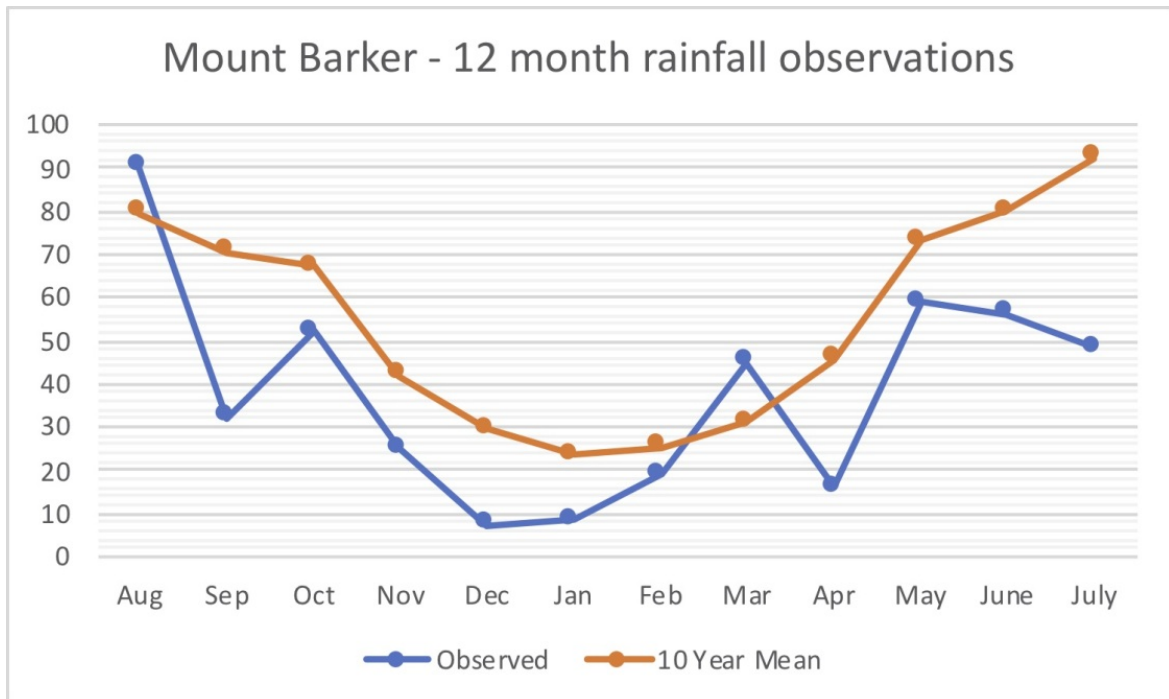
The Regional Estuaries Initiative is a State Government program that aims to improve the health of our south-west estuaries. In June 2020, Healthy Estuaries WA was launched to build on the work of the Regional Estuaries Initiative. The Regional Estuaries Initiative and Healthy Estuaries WA is supported by the State Government's Royalties for Regions Program.

Rainfall Update

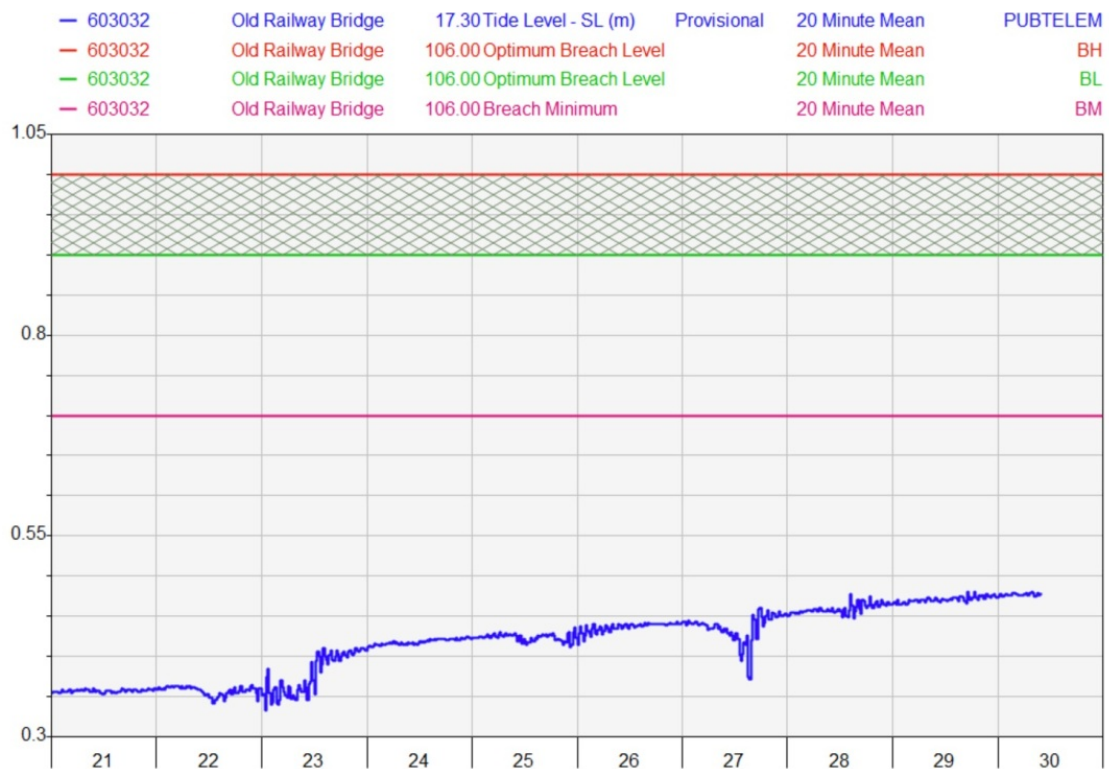
We continue to have a big variation in rainfall between the coast and upper catchment areas. Denmark has had what would be considered an average start to winter while Mt. Barker is getting stuff all. A strong cold front in late June brought good coastal rainfall but did little for our inland growers. Looking ahead, BoM reckons a warmer than normal Indian Ocean will bring us some good rain from August to October.

St. Werburghs sheep farmer, Wilbur Wilson says, "A bit more wouldn't go astray. It's green. We recently cleaned out our soaks. A couple of them aren't looking too bad but definitely still below

average."



Inlet Update



[Click here for the latest inlet level](#)

[Click here for latest inlet monitoring data](#)



Water level at the old railway bridge

Wilson Inlet gets a Water Quality Improvement Plan

Denmark community members are being encouraged to have their say, in a new online survey,

about what environmental, recreational and economic estuary values matter most to them as part of a new plan to protect the Wilson Inlet. Led by the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation (DWER) and Wilson Inlet Catchment Committee (WICC), the Water Quality Improvement Plan (WQI Plan) will highlight the on-ground actions needed to reduce nutrients in the inlet and protect community and environmental values.

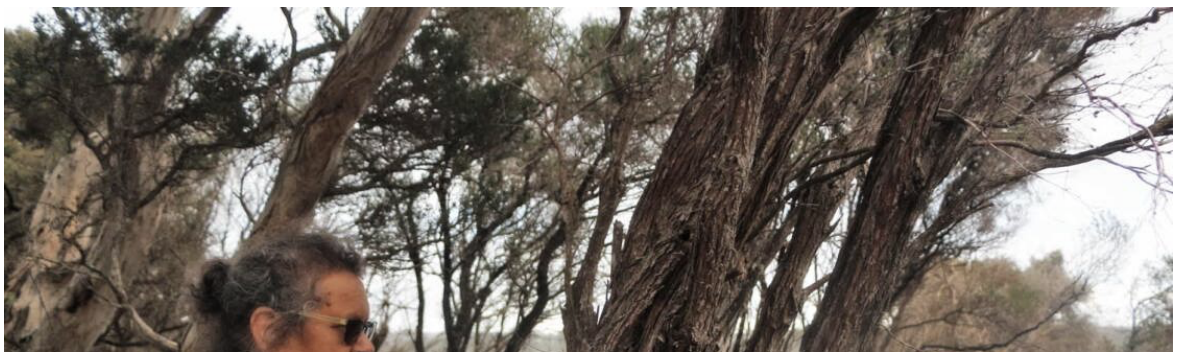
DWER's Aquatic Science Manager, Malcolm Robb, said that while Wilson Inlet is currently in good condition it needs ongoing action to keep it this way. "We know how much the Denmark community cares about the Wilson Inlet and we want locals to have their say on our online survey," Mr Robb said. "Nutrients like phosphorous and nitrogen, entering from the catchment, can have the biggest impact on the health of the inlet. Nutrients can fuel excessive growth of algae, tipping the balance of the ecosystem. They also fuel the growth of the seagrass *Ruppia* and, while this is preferable to algae, locals know that the seagrass can cause an unpleasant smell and make boating on the inlet difficult."

The WQI Plan will use scientific research and evaluation drawn from monitoring data, modelling of nutrient sources and community consultation. "Estuaries are very complex systems and we'll be using knowledge built over the last two decades to identify which actions should be prioritised. But it's also imperative that we capture community knowledge and identify what matters most to the local area," Mr Robb said. "While the WQI Plan is the next step in protecting the health of the Wilson Inlet it is only the latest in a series of sustained efforts to look after the inlet."

The Wilson Inlet Management Strategy 2013-2023 has been guiding actions to reduce nutrients entering the inlet for the last seven years. The strategy was reviewed by WICC in February, with input from DWER and stakeholders including the Denmark Shire, the City of Albany, the Water Corporation, the Shire of Plantagenet, the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development and Green Skills.

Have your say [HERE](#) (by 3rd of August)

A message from our Elders





Lynette looks over traditional Menang camping site at Wilson Inlet



Lynette and son Harrison



Fish traps of Wilson Inlet



Lynett Knapp Interview.mp3

[Download File](#)

WICC recently caught up with local Menang Elder, Lynette Knapp, on the shores of Wilson Inlet at an undisclosed traditional Menang camping site to discuss a range of topics and stories she was passionate about. We recommend to listen to the whole interview (file above) with the inlet lapping in the background. Here are a few take away messages from our chat...

On entering other tribal groups country

Lynette: There were certain seasons they were allowed to come in and access the fish traps. So they would come down and salt and smoke all of the fish that they had to take back inland. You got caught in someone else's country you would be in a whole heap of trouble. There were pathways that were used between country. These later became the highways that we know today, like the Albany Highway. When the explorers (Europeans) came in they had Aboriginal guides, and the guides would have to stick to those pathways or they would be killed.... But Wilson Inlet was huge. It was an absolutely huge place for Aboriginal people.

On the fish traps of Wilson Inlet

Lynette: Everything was a life skill. It was survival. It goes beyond a life skill because it was survival. All this sharpening on the rocks you see around you, it is a survival technique. To catch the swans, get the fish out of the fish traps. The swan was one of our main meals. Swan was beautiful. My Dad would figure out which swan was by itself... and (it didn't end well for the swan). We not only had the stone traps but we had grass traps. My family was also synonymous with the stick

only had the stone traps but we had grass traps. My family was also synonymous with the stick traps. They would put a line (so there were two lines of sticks in parallel) in the water and then gather all of the weed and then they would grass it. They would come get all of the weed and cover the stick with the weed... so when the mullet was on the run, they would come and jump over the first obstacle and straight into the second one. Then they would come and gather all of the fish.

On totems

Lynette: We know where we are because we are totemic people. We belong to two totems. That of a plant and that of an animal. So when we die, we believe our spirits go into that of our totem to replenish and keep them going. But when they die, they become totemic spirits and go into the rocks of the Porongorups. We have certain people that will pronounce it with a 'P' and certain people who will pronounce it with a 'B'. We say Borongorup.

On concerns for the fish traps of Wilson Inlet

Lynette: My family visits this sight often, we clean up rubbish that has been left behind by visitors. People are destroying them. Moving rocks without care of concern for their actions. They need to be protected.

Weeds in focus



The Western Banjo Frog or Pobblebonk *Limnodonastes dorsalis*

Surfactants are often added to herbicides to enhance their efficiency for weed control. Improving herbicide efficiency means you can use less herbicide. While this is a good thing, surfactants are also highly toxic to our hoppy friends. Frog physiology makes them susceptible to pollutants on land and in water. Their permeable skin puts them more at risk than other animals, as does the gill system of tadpoles. Toxic chemicals often persist in aquatic systems over a long-time frame.

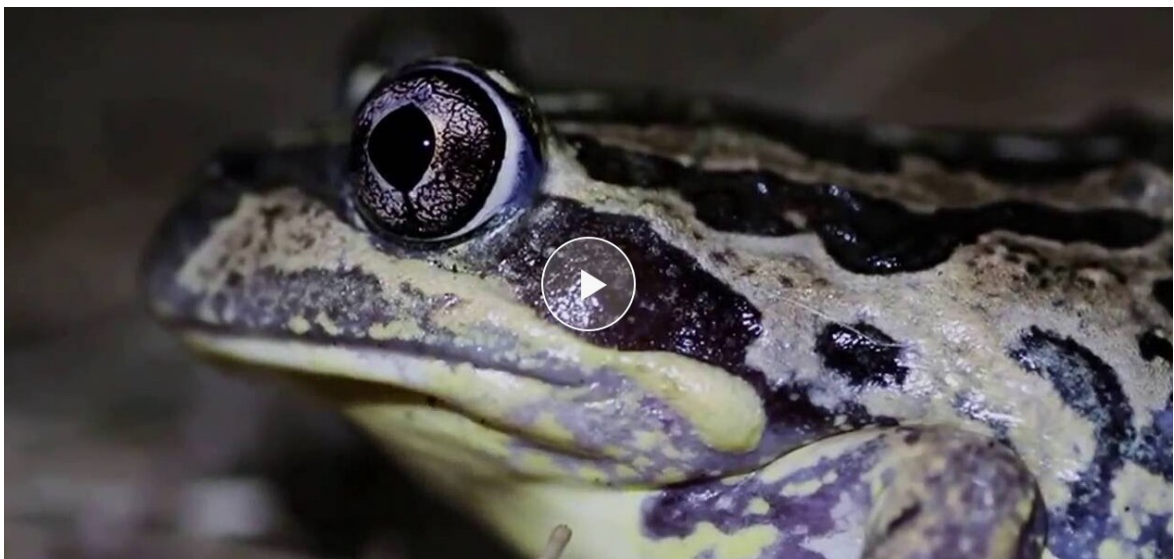
These can occur under different names, eg non-ionic surfactants or herbicide wetting agents. Surfactant effects can be twofold: potentially increasing the absorption of the active chemical and

being absorbed as a toxic pollutant in itself. Frogs have a useful role in ecosystems with invertebrates a part of their diet and in turn being food for predators including birds in the glorious web of life.

Think carefully before choosing a control method. Some products marketed as 'frog friendly' still need investigation as well as careful planning with rain events and other environmental factors. Information can be checked with relevant government departments, WA Museum and special interest conservation groups.

A good rule of thumb is if you hear croaking then keep the chems in the shed.

Contact WICC for further info.



Listen to the call of the Pobblebonk

A history of Farming on the Wilson Inlet

THE FIRST ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF FARMING IN THE WILSON INLET CATCHMENT AND SURROUNDING AREAS.

Ashleigh Murch, Denmark Historical Society Inc





A settler with his maize crop



Ploughing a furrow for potato planting on Gustav Hard's farm

The first farm in the Catchment was established in 1835. Sir Richard Spencer, the Government Resident at Albany, sent two of his sons and some support workers to establish a farm on the upper reaches of the Hay River, south of Mt Barker. The land, purchased from Sir James Stirling, had been noted by Alexander Collie as promising agricultural land during an 1832 expedition through the region. The land was well suited to agriculture and by 1837 it was a thriving sheep station, well fenced and had a fruit orchard, grape vines and milking cows. By 1840 the farm had 900 breeding ewes, 40 acres of wheat and 20 breeding cows.

St Werburgh's farm was established nearby in 1842 by George Egerton-Warburton. This soon became a productive mixed farm. George was a progressive farmer and had a water mill and a threshing machine built for him by an itinerant American mechanic. Despite these improvements farming at that time was heavily labour intensive, particularly during seeding, harvesting and shearing.

In the late 1830s, Henry Tully and David Young started farming around what is now Young's Siding, close to the eastern end of Wilson's Inlet. In 1846 Tully sold his farm, Marblup, to Young who continued farming in the area for many years. Others also established farms in the area later in the 19th Century. Potatoes were the main crop which thrived in the heavy, moist, peaty soil. The potato crops yielded around five tons to the acre and at 8d to the ton they were a lucrative crop. There

crops yielded around five tons to the acre and at £10 to the ton they were a lucrative crop. There were problems for those farming close to the inlet. During spring when the inlet's water level rose, the potato crops were often flooded. The farmers pressured the authorities to open the inlet's ocean bar to drop the water level. Other crops grown in the area were root crops such as turnips and beet and sometimes cabbages and other brassicas. Until the 1940s most market gardening was unmechanised, using horse drawn ploughs, hand sowing and hand harvesting.

In 1895, Millars established an extensive timber milling project on the banks of the Denmark River. The business thrived for approximately ten years. Millars had found a ready market for the giant Karris which they harvested from west of the Denmark River. This enterprise brought a number of important changes which benefited agriculture. Most important was the rail link between Denmark and Albany which provided a ready source of transport for farmers to get their produce to their markets. The town of Denmark had a population of about 1000 which also provided a ready market for fresh food. The tracts of land left cleared after Millars had removed the Karris provided potential agricultural land, without the cost of clearing which in Karri country was expensive.

Early in the 20th Century, the Western Australian Government wanted WA to become self sufficient in agriculture. Although wheat and sheep production were thriving, there was not enough dairy production or fruit and vegetable supplies. WA relied heavily on the Eastern states for these commodities, reportedly spending about £2,000 a day to import them. The Minister for Lands and Agriculture of the time, James Mitchell, saw the south coast with its high rainfall, areas of good soil and much cooler summers as a potential location to develop these industries. He toured the region himself and encouraged several studies of the area looking for the most appropriate sites to develop. The conclusion of all these investigations was that there were extensive areas around Denmark suited to dairying, fodder production, stone and pome fruit growing and raising vegetables, particularly potatoes, root vegetables and brassicas.

When Millars moved out of Denmark in 1904/5, they wanted to dismantle, removing and sell the town and Denmark-Albany rail line. Two local families petitioned the WA Government to purchase the town and railway line. In 1908 the Government, after protracted negotiations, bought the Denmark Estate and the line from Millars for £50,000. The estate comprised 25,000 acres, much of it partially cleared of Karri, as well as the town and the railway line. The purchase was justified by the potential to set up extensive dairy farming in the area and that the town and the railway line would be needed to support this. At first the Government decided to do further clearing and planting of pasture before offering blocks for sale. First land sales began in October 1909, with many of the purchasers already owning and farming land in the area. Over the next few years more of the blocks were sold, some to experienced farmers from elsewhere in the state as well as others with no experience who wanted to try their hand at farming. Many of the latter came from the WA goldfields which at that time were in decline.

In 1912 the WA government set up the 'Denmark State Farm' (later to become the Denmark Agricultural Research Station). The Farm's purpose was to support the local farmers in establishing progressive dairying and fruit and vegetable cultivation methods. No time was wasted in getting the station operational. By 1913 the Farm was experimenting with fodder and other crops: barley, oats, maize, millet, sugar beet, potatoes, pumpkins and peas. A wide variety of fruit trees had also been planted. At that time it had also acquired a Jersey bull and seven Jersey milking cows, as well as a Berkshire boar. The boar and the bull were made available to local farmers for stud purposes. By the end of 1914 the Farm also had extensive milking facilities, a piggery, a dairy, and a small butter factory and bacon factory to process local farmers' produce. The State Farm was a success, helping establish a small but thriving community of dairying and mixed farming. The local farmers were also very good at supporting themselves. They established the Denmark Settlers' Association

in 1909 and were very active and effective at advocating for their cause.

The First World War slowed the development of farming in Denmark. After the war, the WA government wanted more agricultural production particularly more dairying in the region. This was enthusiastically driven by James Mitchell who had become Premier of WA in 1919. He was commonly referred to as Moo-Cow Mitchell because of his enthusiasm for dairying. Mitchell was a strong proponent of the white Australia policy and was keen to encourage British migration to Western Australia. This led to the development of the Group Settlement Scheme. Groups of British families with at least three children were recruited to come to the south-west of WA to develop dairy farms. They were promised a free grant of about 160 acres of land if they cleared the land for production. In addition, they were promised a cottage, sheds, stock and plant for a 30-year mortgage. Each group comprised about 20 families. Most of the settlers came from city backgrounds with no farming experience. There were 15 groups in the Denmark area between Denmark and Bow River.

The men of the Settlement scheme worked for subsistence wages, in groups clearing about 25 acres on each block in the group. Once the blocks were partly cleared, the settlers would move onto their blocks and begin preparing their land for pasture and crops. The Government provided materials for fencing and clearing which was capitalised against the farm. The cost of cows, horses, fertiliser and implements were added to the settlers' debts.



Group settlers with tin shed accomodation





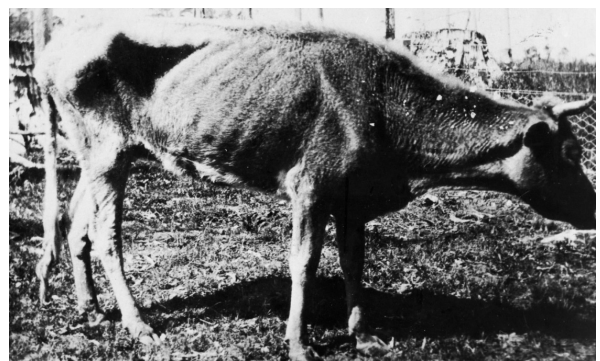
Harvesting potatoes on Gustav Hard farm

Within a few years almost half of these Group settlers had left. There were many problems which drove them out of the area. Clearing Karri with hand tools was slow, hard work. The 'houses' they had been provided with were not fit for human habitation with no floor, windows or proper door, and no means of cooking other than on a camp fire. The groups were isolated and most were many hours travel, by horse or foot, from Denmark. Food and other supplies were only delivered once a month. The problem of isolation was not fully resolved until the railway and road connecting Denmark to Nornalup were completed in 1929. Even then several Groups had to make long trips over poor tracks to reach the road or railway.

The Group settlers also had problems with their farm animals. The cattle which the government had provided were often poor quality. Compounding this was the effect of Denmark wasting disease. The disease occurred when healthy cows which were grazing on lush pasture slowly wasted away and died. At first no-one understood the cause, although it was known it only occurred on those properties which had extensive stands of Karri. Various remedies were touted without success. Many affected settlers asked the government to allow them to move to the abandoned properties on non-Karri land. The local Settlers' Association persisted in seeking a solution which resulted in an extensive investigation of the problem by scientists from the WA Agriculture Department. In 1934, the Department's scientists confirmed that the disease was caused by deficiency of cobalt and to a lesser extent copper. Denmark wasting disease could then be easily prevented by giving cobalt and copper licks to cattle in the affected areas.



The first cows for Denmark State Farm arrive
1914



Cow with wasting disease

By the late 1920s the Group settlers who had remained were starting to get their farms established. A new butter factory was opened in Denmark in 1926 to support them, and some of the farmers began to make a living. However the Great Depression of the early 1930s drove the price of cream down so low that there was another wave of departures and abandoned blocks.

The Group Settlement scheme failed due to inadequate planning, rushed procedures, unfair expectations, inexperienced farmers, unsuitable land, poor transport, isolation, a harsh environment

and the cattle wasting disease. The failed scheme left many debts to both the settlers and to the three governments involved.

By the end of the 1930s fruit was becoming an export crop for Australia. Since dairying had failed to be profitable in the Denmark region, many of the original farmers and as well as the group settlers turned to fruit growing. This market was interrupted by World War Two but fruit growing became a prime crop in the immediate post war years.

This brief overview of the first 100 years of farming in the Denmark area shows that for the most part it was a hard slog. The Government's early high expectations for the area were never really met. Too little attention was paid to the isolation of the region from its markets and too little effort was put into resolving the issue.

For more specific information on aspects of farming in the area, please contact me on 0414936874 or the the Denmark Historical Society at:

info@denmarkhistoricalsocietywa.org.au

or visit the Denmark Museum 16 Mitchell St Denmark WA

Landholder opportunitites



Department of Water and Environmental Regulation
Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development



Soil testing to support better fertiliser decisions

Expressions of interest now open!



**Join over 1000 farmers working to increase farm productivity and
improve the health of our waterways and estuaries!**

Can I apply?

This program is available to beef, dairy and sheep grazing enterprises. You must be located in one of the funding catchments: Peel-Harvey, Leschenault, Vasse-Wonnerup, Hardy Inlet, Wilson Inlet Torbay Inlet or Oyster Harbour.

What's in it for me?

- Soil testing of your whole farm
- Results and advice at a local workshop
- Personalised, one-on-one agronomic advice
- Plant tissue testing

How much does it cost?

Farmers are required to contribute \$300 to receive over \$4000 in value.

Expressions of interest close 14 August 2020

Go to estuaries.dwer.wa.gov.au/
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Contact Shaun Ossinger
Email: info@wicc.org.au
Ph: 0401 291 457

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