

Snowy farmer sees birds returning

The iconic Snowy River is home to a diverse range of native fish, birds and plant species. With its stunning scenic landscapes it offers spectacular canoeing and rafting opportunities.

It also has significant indigenous cultural heritage sites and rich fertile river flats used for farming.

With 100 acres of Snowy River frontage Robert "Biddy" Russell saw the benefit of trying to do something to reduce the impact of reduced flows and previous land management practices, done in good faith at the time. Together with landholders, extensive work over many years has been conducted by the East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority and its predecessor, the Snowy River Improvement Trust.

Initial work included fencing off stock access to the river and willow removal. This was followed by planting of a variety of native species from small tussocks to much larger trees which, once established, help protect the banks.

"Although I do believe that just fencing the river and letting it go it would eventually heal itself, I just think it would have taken a lot longer," Biddy said.

"The fencing off is really important as the banks were pretty raw with sand. Every time the cows went to the river they would take a couple of hooves' full of sand, pushing it into the river.

"As much as I have done this work on my property to protect my land, I also love that the birds are back; the little birds, the waders that disappeared for years, as well as the magnificent sea eagles that nest and feed on my property.

"The corridor of trees I've planted links up to the natural bush and offers them a place to shelter, nest and feed but it also offers shelter for my cows and maybe a buffer for potential big flood waters. There is a real balance and I think it's a good balance."

CMA chief executive officer, Graeme Dear, said the long-term commitment to the rehabilitation of the Snowy River from the Victorian Government includes projects implemented by government agencies, community groups and landholders.

"By everyone working together over a long time, we have seen very positive changes to the river," Mr Dear said.

The work that Biddy has undertaken on his property hasn't suffered any major flood event, which has helped it become the well established vegetation it is today.

"It would be unrealistic to believe that in a major flood no damage would occur. It is the lesser damage during minor floods, the return of



The river frontage on Biddy Russell's property before and after rehabilitation works. (PS)



the native birds and the improvement of the river health that inspires me to continue," he said.

Biddy will continue to work with the CMA, noting that "staying on top of weeds is very important and I'd like to see more planting in some areas where it's not as thick with vegetation".

"It's my belief that the work that has been done is a positive thing and the river is recovering. I think the river is in good nick actually."