

sustainable  
agriculture



## Perennial pastures turn unproductive sand into productive land



### Project Snapshot

Land Manager Name:	Peter Whitfield
Property Size:	6300 ha
Location:	Konnongorring
Annual Rainfall (mm):	350 mm
Enterprise Mix:	Crop 70%, Stock 30%
Soil Types/Vegetation Types:	Grey sand, yellow sand in the trial paddock

### Key Messages

- Even if something isn't common practice, it is worth giving it a go on a small scale.
- Sub-tropical grasses can provide out of season feed and protect the soil from strong winds.
- Before planting a summer active crop ensure a good knockdown spray is applied.

*This project is supported by Wheatbelt NRM, through funding from the Australian Government's Caring for our Country.*

## Their story

Peter Whitfield found out about the Wheatbelt NRM project via a staff member from the group. "I wanted to try something different on unproductive soil types", he said. "Years of yield mapping had shown us how bad these soils really are and the funding was a chance to help me improve them".

With some technical guidance provided through the project, Peter decided to establish 40ha of sub-tropical grasses on part of a paddock that underperformed and was being wind eroded.

From the beginning Peter was hesitant about planting the sub-tropical grasses (active during the summer) saying, "I was sceptical that it wouldn't work on my place. Traditionally sub-tropical grasses aren't suited to the environmental conditions at Konnongorring". Given the funding opportunity however, he decided to go ahead and try the Evergreen Northern mix (Signal Grass (20%), Gatton Panic (60%) and Rhodes grass (20%)). It was sown in spring at 5kg/ha after a knockdown. "The trial area was sown in dry circumstances, but they happened to get some summer rainfall (late November and 40mm in January) and established fairly well". Peter also added, "We also had another 20mm in March which has helped too".

## Lessons Learnt

Peter has learnt some things along the way but says that he hasn't made many changes to his farming practices. "Forty hectares isn't a big enough area to result in a change to my enterprise just yet". The trial that he was funded for was to reduce wind erosion on a sandy paddock that is unproductive. Peter says that, "I am really happy to see that there is no wind erosion on the site as the pastures have established well". Peter explained another bonus from being involved in the project saying, "I am now getting some production off a paddock which I normally wouldn't get, especially this time of the year". Peter is happy with the way the project went and says that he would do the same thing again if he had the chance, but mentioned the importance of a knockdown.

Right: Rhodes grass

## Looking forward

By trialling the sub-tropical grasses successfully on this one paddock, it has now given Peter an option for these sandy soils. This season he plans to establish serradella to the paddock to provide a source of winter feed, but also nitrogen for the sub-tropical perennial grasses.

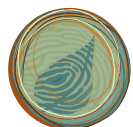
Peter plans to try out the mix of sub-tropical grasses on another area of about 40 ha. The main reason for this is because he now knows the benefits of the sub-tropical grasses and how they fit into his farming system. "I will eventually try to get my sandy, underperforming soils (200ha) into some perennials", Peter stated. He also plans to explore what perennial pastures may be suitable to land that at times is waterlogged in order to turn more unproductive land into productive land.



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