

‘Sedges on edges’ – Improving farm dams

by Phil Barron, Barron Environmental, February 2021

Farm dams

Farm dams are important sources of water and a typical sight in our dry Australian landscape. However, open, bare-edged dams can also attract bird species such as corellas and sulphur-crested cockatoos, which may become destructive when they are over-abundant in some regions. These bird species often approach in flocks to drink and feel safe about being able to spot and get away from predators. These dams can also be a safety hazard as it may be easy to slip and fall in!



Figure 1. An open, bare-edged farm dam (left) compared to a dam selectively vegetated with sedges on the edges (right) [Photos: Phil Barron].

What can we do?

Establish low-growing native ‘**sedges on the edges**’ of dams. These include sedges, *Carex* ssp., and *Cyperus* ssp., and rushes, *Bolboschoenus* ssp., and *Juncus* ssp., with different species suited to different water-levels and periods of inundation. They may also provide suitable habitat for a range of beneficial insectary birds and predatory arthropods.

See the EcoVineyards ‘regional plant species lists’ for more information about species suited to your particular area <https://www.wgcsa.com.au/ecovineyards-factsheets.html>

Why?

- Planting suitable sedge and rush species will make dams less attractive to white cockatoos, as the water’s edge will be less accessible, thus interrupting their line of sight and undermining their sense of safety.
- It will improve water-quality by filtering run-off water entering the dam, reduce disturbance and the likelihood of erosion at the water’s edge, even from wave-action.
- It will also make the dam more attractive for other animal species, including humans!
 - Apart from looking greener and more aesthetically pleasing for us, it will provide more habitat for a wide range of beneficial species and retain open water for ‘wing-drinkers’, such as swallows, martins and also microbats which are important insect pest biocontrol agents!
- It will also improve safety. If someone slips in, they have something to grab on to or stop the slide!

Other points:

- **Don't use tall reeds and rushes** – they can cause other issues by dominating and crowding out the water way!



Figure 2. Reeds clogging a waterway at Coromandel Valley, SA [Photo: Mary Retallack].

- You may need to protect new plants from grazing (including ducks) initially.
- Beware of and avoid the introduced, noxious weed, spiny rush, *Juncus acutus*.
- Samphire, *Tecticornia* spp. and creeping saltbush, *Atriplex semibaccata* can be used in drier, more saline areas.
- Retain small gaps if needed for boats and infrastructure.
- Establish new trees and shrubs away from the sides of the dam to:
 - reduce the line of site for cockatoos (on approach and sense of safety), and
 - reduce the risk of excess water-use and damage to dam-walls, while providing some evaporation-reducing shade and wind-break benefits.
- Team-up with the neighbours, a landscape-level approach is recommended.

Thank you to our project partners



Acknowledgement of country

The EcoVineyards project acknowledges Aboriginal people as the First Peoples and Nations of the lands and waters we live and work upon and we pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging. We acknowledge and respect the deep spiritual connection and the relationship that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have to Country.

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