

Case study

Clare Valley Wine Region

SKILLOGALEE
CLARE VALLEY

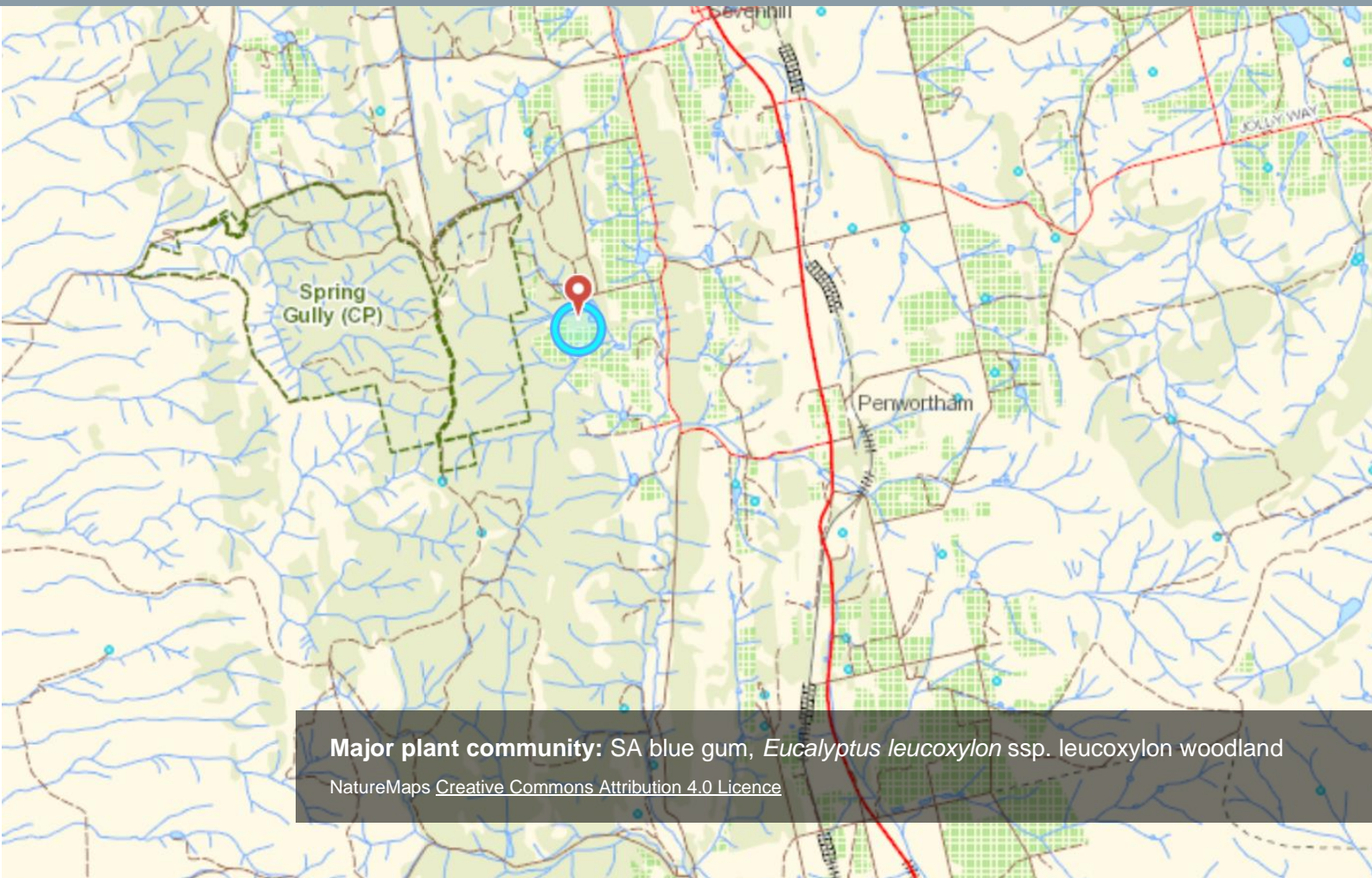
Skillogalee Wines, Spring Gully, SA

EcoGrowers: Kerri Thompson, Brendon Pudney and Simon Clausen

"We feel that we had great support for this project from the EcoVineyards team, other local participants, and our own staff. It has been a really positive engagement, feels good for the soul and has given us a great opportunity to learn from the experience of others."



October 2023



Caring for the unique soils, landscape, and functioning ecosystems of our 170-hectare estate is central to our ethos and practices at Skillogalee Wines

We are proud to be part of the EcoVineyards program and believe that its championing of practical, region-specific sustainability pathways and outcomes is vital to the long-term resilience and prosperity of our wine-making region.

Maximising soil health, enriching biodiversity and prioritising low-impact vineyard practices will continue to be a key focus as our business grows, and we see great potential for further EcoGrower activities on our estate to build our expertise as sustainable growers and effective land stewards.

We look forward to deepening our involvement with this landmark program and with local EcoGrower networks.

Skillogalee is a family-owned winery set amongst the wooded hills of the picturesque Clare Valley and is home to some 50 hectares of vineyards, a cellar door and restaurant open seven days per week and accommodation sites.

Our cool climate vineyards, situated in the Skillogalee Valley were planted in 1970 and sit between 420 and 500 metres above sea level. Our varietals include Riesling, Gewürztraminer and Chardonnay and red varietals Shiraz, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Malbec, Grenache, and Muscat grapes. Dry grown, contour planted, hand pruned and largely hand-picked.



Our project goals were two-fold

Firstly, to create a sustainable low maintenance / low water environment which will include native plants and shrubs to beautify the cellar door entrance experience.

This has also allowed us an opportunity to include an educational experience to our customers with the inclusion of communicative signage.

Secondly, we hope to show that by planting native grasses in the undervine and mid row areas, as well as the 'beetle bank' contour, we can eliminate ground working and improve soil structure in a dry grown environment with an overall improvement of the biodiversity and health of the vineyard ecosystem.

We are passionate about sustainable management, and we see our EcoVineyards project as an important component of this process.

With the support and expertise of Dr Mary Retallack and her team we have gained important knowledge that will assist us ongoing.



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Page 2

EcoGrowers: Kerri Thompson, Brendon Pudney and Simon Clausen

Clare Valley Wine Region



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What worked well?

Regarding our project plans:

- The additional commitment of purchasing taller Mallee Flute Guards at 450 mm high and the stronger Jute square weed matting was most helpful in terms of weed control and protection for the new plantings.
- We also recommend investing in a mechanised tree planting auger which facilitated planting but also allowed a deeper hole and better chance of establishment.

Relating to plant species we have had great success with:

- *Hardenbergia violacea*, native lilac
- *Olearia ramulosa*, twiggly daisy bush
- *Vittadinia blackii*, New Holland daisy

We're very excited to see the wallaby grass and several mixed native species now growing within the mid row and hoping that these will continue to thrive and self-seed in the future.

Progress (June 2021 to 2023):

What did you do and when?

In Spring 2021 we submitted our Biodiversity Action Plan which outlined the vineyard and cellar door areas of focus. See MAP. We then proceeded to prepare the area along the cellar door carpark fence line and around the stobie pole clearing for native planting.

Additionally, we prepared the undervine and mid row area of the A4 Riesling block adjacent to cellar door in preparation for wallaby grass seeding in 22 with Andrew Fernley from Native Seeds. Since we are opposed to herbicide spraying, we chose to regularly cultivate to eliminate weed growth. The Wallaby grass mid rows were finally seeded in September 22.

Native plant tube stocks were ordered through Kersbrook Nursery, along with weed matting and grow guards and in May 22 we planted 250 mixed species as follows along our cellar door fence line, ends of vineyard rows and the contour beetle bank:

- *Bursaria spinosa*, sweet bursaria
- *Eremophila maculata* spotted emu bush
- *Hardenbergia violacea* native lilac
- *Olearia ramulosa* twiggly daisy bush
- *Vittadinia blackii*. New Holland daisy

Our predator pole and bat boxes were installed and on 1 June we were able to host an EcoVineyards presentation with the assistance of Dr Mary Retallack on site to communicate our progress.





Above: Planting native insectary plants adjacent to the strainers in Autumn 2022 (Photo: Kerri Thompson).

Below: Same area in Spring 2022 (Photo: Mary Retallack).



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Page 4

Main photo: Kerri Thompson and Brendan Pudney at the site of the new beetle bank created on an existing contour in 2021 (Photos: Mary Retallack).
Inset: Native insectary ground covers and small shrubs growing on the beetle bank in June and December 2022.



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Page 5

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Clare Valley Wine Region



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Pitfalls to avoid?

Due to the really wet conditions in Winter/Spring of 22 regular cultivation for area preparation proved to be difficult in terms of accessibility and meant that our preparation was not as clean as we had originally hoped.

Weather also impacted on our ability to seed the wallaby grasses and so after many attempts this finally happened in September 2022.

Whilst the wet conditions proved largely beneficial in establishing our new native plantings the cold conditions meant that we lost an estimated 25% of plantings and mainly *Bursaria spinosa*, sweet bursaria which has not grown well on our site.

We are hoping that in a different planting season this will improve because the established *Bursaria spinosa* on other parts of the property are thriving.

We are very conscious of the labour-intensive weed management around the natives and so regular whipper snipper practices are scheduled to assist with clean ups and this needs to be a part of any management plan.

In future we will include some more ground covering / spreading species along the contour bank and trial wallaby grass under vine to assist with weed control.

Progress (June 2021 to 2023):

Where to from here?

We currently have on order an additional 500 tube stock plants for 2023 replacement and extension planting including:

- *Bursaria spinosa*, sweet bursaria
- *Cymbopogon ambiguus*, native lemongrass
- *Dodonaea viscosa*, sticky hopbush
- *Eremophila maculata*, spotted emu bush
- *Hardenbergia violacea*, native lilac
- *Myoporum parvifolium*, creeping boobialla
- *Olearia ramulosa*, twiggy daisy bush
- *Santalum acuminatum*, desert quandong
- *Scaevola aemula*, fairy fan flower
- *Vittadinia blackii*, New Holland daisy

This is to cover some replacement stock, ground covering and some new native plants to feature as part of the cellar door / restaurant dining experience.

We have new EcoVineyards signage on order to include all the new native species on site and feature this as part of our communication with customers in cellar door.

Formalising our philosophical approach to growing resilience naturally - with the help of the EcoVineyards project, has been a rewarding and all-inclusive learning experience for our team.

It feels good to build a connection to our land and work towards an overall improvement of the biodiversity and health of our vineyard ecosystem.

We look forward to continuing our EcoVineyards journey as newly selected participants for round 2 of the programme which will feature the rejuvenation, restoration, and replacement project of our creek beds within our vineyard.





Above and below: The insectary area adjacent to the cellar door and Kerri Thompson inspecting the native insectary plants growing adjacent to the strainer posts November 2022 (Photos: Mary Retallack).



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Page 7



Clockwise: Kerri Thompson carrying out a water infiltration test, native lilac growing along the fence and microbat boxes installed to provide supplementary habitat (Photos: Mary Retallack).



DISCOVER OUR ECOVINEYARD

Christmas bush or sweet bursaria, *Bursaria spinosa*

(Apiales: Pittosporaceae)

SPECIES CARD



Christmas bush typically flowers from late spring until late summer.



The flowers produce pollen and nectar, food for beneficial insects and spiders.



Mature seeds located in the purse/heart-shaped capsules rattle in the wind.



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For more information about the EcoVineyards
project scan the QR code or visit
www.wgcsa.com.au/ecovineyards



This project is supported by the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment through funding from Australian Government's National Landcare Program (June 2020)
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.



Main photo: The midrow was planted to native grasses and forb in June 2022.

Inset: Wallaby grasses can be seen in the midrow the following spring, they flower in November each year (Photos: Mary Retallack).



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Page 10

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Clare Valley Wine Region



Native plant list:

- *Bursaria spinosa*, sweet bursaria
- *Cymbopogon ambiguus*, native lemongrass
- *Dodonaea viscosa*, sticky hopbush
- *Eremophila maculata*, spotted emu bush
- *Hardenbergia violacea*, native lilac (climber)
- *Myoporum parvifolium*, creeping boobialla
- *Olearia ramulosa*, twiggy daisy bush
- *Santalum acuminatum*, desert quandong
- *Scaevola aemula*, fairy fan flower
- *Vittadinia blackii*, New Holland daisy

Above: *Vittadinia blackii*, New Holland daisy (Photo: Mary Retallack). **Below:** The Skilly team installing new native insectary plant signs (Photo: Kerri Thompson).



Expenses (cash and in-kind)

Name: Skillogalee Wines			Region: Clare Valley		
Date	Activity	Number of plants	Grant cash expenses	Additional cash co-contribution	In-kind time captured
19/04/2022	Hardwood Stakes 11x38x750mm (0.83 ea)	300		\$ 249	
10/05/2022	Planting time (5 people x 5 hours)				25 hrs
19/04/2022	Mallee Flute Tree Guard 450mm high, 200mm sides (300 x1.52 ea)			\$ 456	
19/04/2022	Jute Squares 800gsm, 370mm, 4 slits, 100/bundle (3 x \$87.60 per 100)			\$ 263	
19/04/2022	Freight			\$ 140	
19/04/2022	Tree Planting auger, 500mm x 80mm wide, to suit Still BT45			\$ 343	
19/05/2022	Tube stock (@ 1.70 ea)	190		\$ 323	
19/05/2022	Difficult to propagate/cutting grown tube stock (@ 3.00 ea)	60	\$ 113	\$ 68	
20/07/2022	Native Grass Midrow by Andrew Fairney		\$ 1,200		
20/07/2022	Native Seed Supply		\$ 2,168		
20/07/2022	Travel related expenses shared with Penna Lane		\$ 520		
TOTAL		550	\$ 4,000	\$ 1,841	25 hrs

Program partners



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Acknowledgement of country

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For more info about the National EcoVineyards Program see <https://www.ecovineyards.com.au>

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