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DROUGHT YIELDS BENEFITS FOR TARRION CREEK, NEAR BREWARRINA

While a force of nature has resulted in an unexpected improvement in the water quality of Tarrion Creek near Brewarrina, the will of a conservation-minded farming family aims to keep it that way.

Mr Mac George of Tarrion Station says that that carp in the creek have died, leading to an improvement in water quality which will be further encouraged now that the waterway is fenced and stock watering points installed.

"Tarrion Creek used to have lots of native fish, the best crayfish waterhole in the Brewarrina district and so many mussels you could fill a bucket in a matter of minutes, but the carp destroyed all of that," Mr George said.

"However, as the creek dried up in October-November 2005, the carp became so concentrated you could just about walk across the creek on them and they died out," he said.

With 66mm of rain in May 2007, the creek is now about 1.5 metres deep.

According to Mr George, the water is almost clear and there are now a number of aquatic birds on the waterway including small ducklings.

His desire to protect native animals and plants motivated Mr George and his family to completely fence and exclude stock from the Tarrion Creek on his property last year.

The George family had already fenced 7.5km of the waterway and had seen the benefits.

They accessed funds through the Western CMA's 2006 Incentive Program to fence a further 8km and install five alternate stock watering points, meaning that the entire creekbank and 460 hectares of riverine vegetation is now protected from the effects of stock movement.

"I'm not a greenie, but I am a conservationist" Mr George said.

"We've done well out of the land and we think that the native animals should also do well from it.

"We could see that the Creek was becoming more eroded from stock living on the steep banks.

"The gullies were becoming deeper and the manure was fouling the water.

"Once the first lot of fencing was done, we could see the improvement. The banks become more stable and despite the drought, there was less erosion and silting.

"Native grasses and Old Man Saltbush started to regenerate and water quality began to improve.

"From a farm management point of view, we no longer had to patrol the creek daily to check for bogged sheep, so that saved a lot of time.



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"When the Western CMA grants became available, we applied and fenced the rest," Mr George said.

As well as an increase in native vegetation, they have seen an increase in native birds and animals returning to the area.

"We've recorded 156 species of native birds along the Tarrion Creek as well as native animals such as the white-tipped wallaby, dunnart, echidna and water rat," Mr George said.

"We've removed African Boxthorn, Noogoora and Bathurst Burr from the banks of the creek and we're always vigilant in controlling feral cats, foxes, pigs and goats.

"In my opinion, the best feral animal is a dead one!

"We're looking forward to watching the area go back to its natural state," he said.

The George family were one of 52 successful applicants in the Western CMA's 2006 Annual Major Incentive Round, which saw a total of \$2.02 million committed to help land managers with natural resource management.

The George's feature in the Western CMA's Annual Achievement Report 2006-2007, which will be officially launched at the Murray Darling Association Conference in Bourke this week.

Copies of the Annual Achievements Report will be mailed to all people on the Western CMA's mailing list and will be available at all Western CMA offices, on the website at www.western.cma.nsw.gov.au or by ringing 1800 101 032.

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Caption: Mac and June George with their granddaughters, Sarah and Holly McDonell.

