

STARTING OFF ON THE RIGHT FOOT DOWN THE HUON

PROPERTY PLANNING



Driving south from Hobart it doesn't take long before you hit the rolling green hills of Southern Tasmania's Huon and Channel country.

Small farms, tucked away in beautiful forested valleys fly past the window, and before you know it you're wishing yourself onto the land. It's the sort of dream that some manage to turn into reality. Pulling up stumps from mainland Australia and buying a small acreage in Southern Tasmania to build their own version of paradise.

It's a story NRM South's Tim Ackroyd knows well. Tim has been working closely with hobby farmers, bush blockers and 'lifestyle-stylers' for more than three years, running a program that gives them the skills they need to turn their vision into reality.

"Probably 90 per cent of people taking the course have moved here from the mainland," says Tim.

"They are drawn to the region because it has plenty of lifestyle properties - nice blocks of land with panoramic views, peace and quiet and a bit of bush. For them the main attraction is the notion that this is a good place to grow things and to own a nice plot of land."

It's a notion that's true when it comes to the tranquillity and natural beauty of the region, but not always the case when it comes to its agricultural possibilities.

"There's a natural inclination to think that land in the Huon is always lush and fertile, but in some cases the soils can be pretty poor and may need to be carefully managed.

So it's important that as new landowners people are realistic about what can be achieved on their property, and that's where our program comes in," says Tim.

Called 'Small Landholders Property Management Program' the program is divided into four workshops run in April and May. It introduces small property owners to a range of technical experts that can help answer basic questions such as 'how many animals can I have' and 'how do I manage my weed problem'.

Participants get personalised maps and aerial photos of their property showing soil, land capability, natural values and infrastructure. They also get ongoing support from NRM South and, perhaps most importantly, the chance to get to know others in the same boat.

"Our program starts with the idea that every property and every property owner is different, and that the best person to make decisions about how that property should be run is the owner," says Tim, "We try and give them the tools to make those decisions."

Based on a model developed elsewhere, Tim has made a number of small adjustments to suit local conditions, including conducting one of the four workshops on a working farm, the remainder of the workshops are then hosted by participants of the program on their own properties.

This provides a platform where participants get the opportunity to look at real life scenarios and to share challenges and ideas relating to their own properties.

THE PROGRAM STARTS PEOPLE ON A JOURNEY, PROVIDING KNOWLEDGE AND RESOURCES ON HOW PEOPLE CAN MANAGE THEIR LAND EFFECTIVELY - WHETHER THEIR FOCUS IS ON ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS OR PRODUCTION CONCERNS - OR A COMBINATION OF BOTH.

It provides access to information, resources and experts and enables people to be able to do their own research and make their own decisions about what is right for their property.

Now in its third year, landowners can't get enough of the program, and it's been warmly received and backed by both the Kingborough and Huon Valley councils, as well as state government departments and other organisations such as the Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture and Private Forests Tasmania who have provided some of the expertise during the sessions.

"A real sense of community has been created through the networks we've created down here," says Tim. "Some 60 landowners have now been through the course and keep in regular contact via local networks. There's a real sense that we're in this together."

For more information:
www.nrmsouth.org.au/pmp