



BUYING A SMALL RURAL PROPERTY IN THE  
UPPER MURRUMBIDGEE CATCHMENT

# Choosing and managing land

THINGS TO CONSIDER AND WHERE TO FIND INFORMATION

*Buying a rural block or a hobby farm is many people's dream. But for some, the dream doesn't last—in some parts of the Upper Murrumbidgee catchment people stay an average of less than three years. They leave disappointed and often out of pocket. Those that don't last often don't understand what land management involves, and may end up damaging the land and environment. You can avoid this happening to you by finding out what moving involves, before you buy. This sheet tells you about some important issues and where you can get more information.*

## Decide what you want to do with your land

Before you start looking at properties, you need to decide what you want to do with your land. Some common land uses in the Upper Murrumbidgee are grazing, horticulture, lifestyle, recreation and nature conservation.

Working out what you want to do will help you work out what type of land and resources you need. For instance, if you want to graze animals, you will need pasture, water, shade, fencing and maybe stock handling facilities. You'll also need to know how many animals per hectare the land can support in the areas you are looking at. If you want to grow vegetables or grapes, you'll need to think about water, soil types, fertility, drainage, slope, and aspect. Making sure the land is capable of supporting your plans before you buy will help you avoid disappointment, financial loss and environmental damage caused by overgrazing, loss of ground cover, erosion and weed invasion.

When you start looking at potential properties, you also need to think about whether your plans are compatible with the way neighbouring landholders are using their land.

## Your responsibilities as a landholder

Before you begin looking at properties, you need to find out about catchment plans and land management guidelines. These may limit what you will be able to do with your land. Some plans are advisory. Other plans place legal restrictions on landholders in order to protect the environment and certain agricultural activities.

Some of things that are regulated by these plans in the Upper Murrumbidgee catchment include animal health, quarantine, stock transport, vegetation clearing, and control of weeds and feral animals.

You may also need a permit to carry out some types of activities on your land—such as obtain water, use farm chemicals, light fires or use firearms.

## Looking after the environment

As a landholder, you will be responsible for looking after the environment. This includes making sure that you do not contribute to problems on other people's land. Features of the landscape that you will be responsible for include vegetation, soils, native animals, watercourses, and wetlands.

Check for signs of soil erosion, salinity or acid soils on land you are thinking of buying.

Fixing these problems may require fences, revegetation or weed control. Managing them often requires long-term effort and constant maintenance.

Check for weeds and feral animals. Weeds are a major and costly problem in the Upper Murrumbidgee catchment. Learn how to identify weeds—it's the first step in controlling them.

You may also want to do a survey of threatened or endangered species on land you are thinking of buying. If there are protected species, you may need to protect their habitat. To do this, you will need information about what to do and what assistance is available—for instance, through management agreements and covenants.

Find out what action is needed—or required by law—and what resources will be required.

### Check resources are available

**Water.** A secure water supply is essential. While newer rural subdivisions may have a reticulated water supply, most small farms have to provide their own water. Water quality and quantity may vary. The cost of a reliable water supply may be high. Before you buy:

- work out how much water you will need for domestic, stock and agricultural use
- find out where the water comes from—tanks, bores, dams, creeks, town supply or a combination of these.
- find out how much water is available, and whether the quality will be acceptable for your plans
- find out whether you will need licenses or permits for storing water or irrigating.

**Waste and effluent.** Few rural blocks have access to mains sewerage. Instead they rely on on-site disposal systems such as septic tanks or composting toilets. Before you buy:

- work out what kind of effluent and waste disposal systems you will need
- learn how to manage and maintain these systems. This will help you avoid trouble and ensure they are environmentally acceptable.

**Garbage.** Find out whether there is a regular garbage disposal service. Rural areas may not have a regular garbage disposal service. Think about your options if there is no garbage service. Recycling, composting and occasional trips to the local tip are some options. Be aware that most councils do not allow you to dispose of garbage outside a council-operated tip.

### Work out what resources you'll need to invest

Resources you will need to turn your plans into reality will include money, energy, time, knowledge, skills and motivation. Having lots of one resource may not make up for a lack of others. Some resources—like knowledge and training—are easier to gain than others. Make sure you can secure all of the resources you will need before you buy a property.

**Setting up.** Work out the likely costs of setting up. Include the time, effort and money for:

- equipment—such as sheds, machinery, stockyards, irrigation pipes, and power
- suitable fencing
- stocking with domestic animals
- establishing crops and pastures.

**Maintenance.** People often overlook or underestimate the costs and effort involved in maintaining their property. Even a bush block needs managing—keeping it clear of weeds or feral animals, and managing erosion or salinity.

Work out a regular maintenance program. It might include:

- stock management
- weed and pest animal control
- fertiliser or lime applications
- revegetation
- fence and equipment maintenance.

**Infrastructure.** Managing a rural property well may require additional equipment and services. These may be located on the property—such as sheds or stockyards. Or they may be available in the local area—such as transport and veterinary services.

- Work out what support services, facilities and equipment you will need. Think about any specialist services you might need to make your plans work.
- Find out what equipment and services are available on the property or in the area. Calculate what it might cost to use services, such as vets or processing equipment
- If you are going to use your land to raise animals or crops, find out whether there are suitable processing services and markets

**Managing risks.** Fire, flood and drought are natural events, but being prepared can help reduce their impact. Think about how you might manage your land to minimise risks to people and property while avoiding environmental damage.

### Think about changes to your lifestyle

Moving from the city to the land can be a major lifestyle change. You need to balance the benefits of fresh air, tranquillity and independence with practical considerations. Think about how your health, childcare, leisure, fitness, and social needs may change.

**Transport.** Work how your transport needs could change when you live in a rural area. Find out what transport options are available in the area—especially for children and after-school activities.

**Your local community.** Living sustainably in a rural area involves working with others to fight fires, control weeds, and manage salinity. Find out how you can get involved in your new community—through landcare groups, bush fire brigades, service and sports clubs.

### Build your skills

Knowledge about sustainable land management is growing rapidly. Getting up-to-date accurate information will help you enjoy your land. Landcare and producer groups provide a good way of building knowledge and sharing experience, and there are many quality publications available.

Think about what training you need to manage your land appropriately. Many courses

are available covering animal and horticultural production, farm and environmental management, chemical use, property management planning, fencing techniques.

## Where to find information

**Department of Land and Water Conservation** [www.dlwc.nsw.gov.au](http://www.dlwc.nsw.gov.au)

- Queanbeyan: 131–139 Monaro St, Queanbeyan, ph: 6297 6477
- Yass: Yass Valley Way, Yass, ph 02 6226 1433
- Cooma: 26 Soho St, Cooma, ph: 6452 1455

**NSW Dept of Agriculture** [www.agric.nsw.gov.au](http://www.agric.nsw.gov.au)

- Queanbeyan: 28 Morisset Street, Queanbeyan NSW 2620, ph 02 6297 1861
- Yass: 102 Meehan St, Yass, ph 02 6226 2199
- Cooma: 39 Bombala St, Cooma NSW 2630, ph: 6452 3411

**NSW Parks and Wildlife Service** [www.npws.nsw.gov.au](http://www.npws.nsw.gov.au)

Southern Directorate: 6 Ruthledge St, Queanbeyan, ph: 02 6297 6144

**Environment ACT** [www.environment.act.gov.au](http://www.environment.act.gov.au)

Macarthur House, 12 Wattle St Lyneham ACT, ph: 132 281

### Local Government

- *Yass Council* [www.yass.nsw.gov.au](http://www.yass.nsw.gov.au)  
209 Comur St, Yass, ph 02 6226 1477
- *Yarrowlumla Council* [www.yarrowlumla.nsw.gov.au](http://www.yarrowlumla.nsw.gov.au)  
11 Farrer Place, Queanbeyan, ph 02 6298 4111
- *Queanbeyan City Council* [www.qcc.nsw.gov.au](http://www.qcc.nsw.gov.au)  
257 Crawford St, Queanbeyan, ph 02 6298 0211
- *Cooma Monaro Council* [cooma.nsw.gov.au](http://cooma.nsw.gov.au)  
81 Commissioner St, Cooma, ph 02 6450 1777
- *Gunning Council* [www.gunning.nsw.gov.au](http://www.gunning.nsw.gov.au)  
123 Yass St, Gunning, ph 02 4845 1312
- *Snowy River Council* [www.snowyriver.nsw.gov.au](http://www.snowyriver.nsw.gov.au)  
2 Myack St, Berridale, ph 02 6450 5195

**Greening Australia ACT & SE NSW** [www.greeningaustralia.org.au](http://www.greeningaustralia.org.au)

Kubura Place, Aranda ACT, ph: 02 6253 3035

### Southern Tablelands Farm Forestry Network

c/- Greening Australia, Kubura Place, Aranda ACT, ph: 02 6253 3035

### Landcare Networks

- Yass Area Network of Landcare Groups, PO Box 23, Yass, NSW 2582, ph: 02 6226 1433
- Upper Murrumbidgee Landcare Network, PO Box 26, Cooma, NSW 2630,  
ph: 02 6452 1455
- ACT Landcare and Catchment Groups/Waterwatch, Environment ACT, ph: 132 281

### Conservation Council of the ACT & SE Region

Kingsley St Acton, ACT, ph: 02 6247 7808 or 6557 2749

*This sheet was prepared by the Upper Murrumbidgee Catchment Coordinating Committee Inc. (UMCCC)—a community organisation working to ensure that the natural resources of the Upper Murrumbidgee catchment are managed on an ecologically sustainable basis. Contact UMCCC Facilitator, c/- Environment ACT, PO Box 144, Lyneham ACT 2602, ph 02 6207 2999*



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