

Media release

18 October 2022

Soil Extension Round-up

The past few months have been a busy time for Cradle Coast NRM Soil Extension Officer Nick Jamson and Regional Agriculture Landcare Facilitator Tom O'Malley. Agfest was 'back in the paddock' during August, where Cradle Coast NRM joined colleagues from NRM North and NRM South to chat with landholders from across the state about their burning issues. As well many conversations with landholders throughout the event, the NRM display also scooped the award for the best display in the lifestyle pavilion!

Half a dozen field sessions were held for graziers, focussing on soil structure management, winter-active tunnelling dung beetles and pasture earthworms. Cradle Coast NRM have set up a breeding nursery for the winter-active tunnelling dung beetle species *Bubas bison*, a species which has poor distribution in northwest Tasmania. Engaging graziers to learn about environmental and production benefits of dung beetles on farms will give rise to new beetle breeding nurseries on participant properties next autumn, when the next generation of *B. bison* beetles emerge from the nursery. Deep-digging pasture earthworms essentially perform the same functions as dung beetles; such as improving soil structure and water infiltration by tunnelling through the soil, cycling nutrients such as phosphorus and breaking down organic matter. Grazier participants were taken to an earthworm nursery where they learned to identify the black headed earthworm (*Aporrectodea longa*) before digging some specimens up to start their own earthworm nursery at home.

A classroom-style workshop session brought a small group of graziers together to unpack what soil test results mean, and how to make decisions based on the results. Soil pH (or acidity) is often the first thing to be mindful of, as acidic soil will lock up many nutrients needed for plant growth and make them unavailable for use. Understanding soil physical properties is also important when looking at soil test results, as physical limitations will affect fertility management decisions. Sandy soils for example have large pore spaces and drain rapidly, compared to clay loams and heavy clay soils, but cannot retain as much moisture and nutrient cations within their structure.

The return of the Burnie Agricultural and Pastoral Society show in late September following a three year hiatus was most welcome, and rounded off a busy few months. Glorious spring weather framed a perfect couple of days which saw around 17,000 people through the gates. Nick and Tom were kept busy at the Cradle Coast NRM marquee talking to landholders of the region for the two-day event, but not as busy as the very impressive bullock team from Circular Head strutting their stuff.

CCA is jointly owned by eight councils of western and north-western tasmania, to help them achieve regional outcomes and maintain strong local government, by working together.



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The Tasmanian NRM Soil Extension Program is a state-wide, collaborative partnership program delivered by the three NRM regions in the state: NRM North, NRM South and Cradle Coast Authority, through funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Program.



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