

# Shape today



**HEADS TOGETHER:** CSIRO scientists Kerry Collins and Stefan Hajkowitz and farmer Ben Hooper work on the Tamar Valley sustainability index at Beaconsfield. Picture: BRUCE MOUNSTER

## Tamar team puts price on protection

TAMMAR Valley Natural Resource Management has initiated a project to assign monetary values to environmental services farmers provide to the community.

Farmers have long provided such services by fencing off creeks and remnant vegetation for the protection of natural resources or ecosystems.

If the Tamar Valley sustainability index project is successful, it could be a basis for cash payments to farmers when they plan such environmental works.

Such plans would have their environmental value assessed via a points system.

CSIRO scientist Stefan Hajkowitz, from Brisbane, in Tasmania to conduct a trial run of the index, said it could lead to a new market for environmental services, with government-

funded programs creating initial demand.

The index, if successful, could be rolled out nationally as a way of bridging the gap between farmers and the wider community's growing demands for environmental stewardship. It factors in environmental works such as weed control, stock exclusion, fences to protect habitat and tree planting for habitat and carbon sinks.

Dr Hajkowitz and two other CSIRO scientists spent three weeks estimating the values of environmental works (planned and completed) on 21 Tamar Valley properties.

Last Friday, Ben Hooper's Springmere property near Beaconsfield was assessed.

The CSIRO team had question-and-answer sessions with farmers and examined aerial maps to

glean information on environmental works.

The information will be added to a geographic information system (GIS) database and run through a scoring procedure.

Dr Hajkowitz said that for Mr Hooper's creekline fencing project, completed four years ago, the scoring system would factor in fence length, efforts to re-vegetate and control weeds, the project's potential to have a favourable impact downstream and its potential to enhance the district.

Mr Hooper will not be getting paid for his efforts but, once environmental services markets have been established, Tamar Valley farmers who plan similar work could be compensated.

Payments in Europe and the US linked to farm subsidy programs.