



BERDUE STATION

LESSONS FROM TACKLING LANDSCAPE-SCALE CHANGE ON-FARM

In 2006, when a new owner took over Berdue Station, a sheep and cattle property near Alexandra, farm manager Luke van Helvoirt was given the responsibility of bringing about significant landscape-scale change across the property.

Luke says, "The new owner hated the look of the bare hills, so in partnership with the Goulburn Broken CMA and the former Department of Primary Industries we set about accessing funding to revegetate a good part of the property and to re-fence to smaller sized paddocks. We also fenced our main 15 kilometre frontage to the Goulburn River."

Today the 1200 ha property, which runs Angus cattle and composite ewes, boasts 250 ha of revegetation.

"Before we started planting we ran about 14,000 DSE (dry sheep equivalent) each year. Now with more than 20 per cent of the farm under trees and shrubs we still run 13,000 DSE and turn out healthier stock with good weight. We turn off steers for feedlots and sell our store lambs at three to four months of age," Luke says.

"When it came to doing works along the river the Goulburn Broken CMA provided 100 per cent of the cost of the works. The funding allowed us to install off-stream watering points with troughs supplied by 63 mm pipe.

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“As part of the riparian works the Goulburn Broken CMA managed the removal of willows along our river frontage. We also built fences along waterways and revegetated along the main river frontage.”

Luke says he started as a farm hand 17 years ago and progressed to farm manager. He says there is a lot to like about the job.

“There is the steep country, fertile undulating country, down to river

flats to manage and diverse livestock to look after. And living on the river I can go fishing every day.

“This is a really healthy section of the river and I regularly see platypus. It is a 15 km section of private land frontage so the only way recreational anglers can get here is by boat or foot.

“I do a lot of trout fishing. With the removal of the willows I noticed a lot of water weed blossomed and a lot more life returned to the river. It is back to how I remember it as a kid. The fish have come back bigger and the water is a lot clearer. It used to be very silty, particularly before and after the drought. These days, I would expect to catch a fish every time I go fishing, especially in the last three years.

“The property comprises 500 ha of hill country (with a lot of surface rock), 500 ha of undulating country and 200 ha of good sandy river flats. All need different grazing strategies for the different ground types.

“There are benefits to locking up and planting trees in hilly country. The first year, the project seems like a disaster with pure Paterson’s Curse and capeweed appearing over the whole site but by the third year, the native grasses and trees smothered the Paterson’s Curse and capeweed by 95 per cent, so it’s worth hanging in there.

“We now aim for 70 per cent ground cover, particularly up on the hills. We are fortunate that the property faces south towards the Goulburn River and we find the hills don’t heat up

as much as the rest of the property, so we can graze the hills during summer.

Whereas most of the neighbouring farms all face north and they don’t have the same option.

“The level of assistance the Goulburn Broken CMA can provide for works in the hill country ranges from \$531 to \$935 per hectare. On average it cost us \$685 per hectare.

“We used to have mostly 10-15 ha paddocks but with all the revegetation work we have been able to reduce them to 5 ha paddocks and now we rotationally graze the stock.

“The Goulburn Broken CMA has quite a lot of guidelines that recipients of funding are expected to follow, but all of them are pretty basic. Land class fencing on the hills, maintaining 70 per cent ground cover etc, all should be part of a farm management plan anyway.

“On the better undulating country we have a good cover of phalaris and clover and the country is in good condition. Most of the Paterson’s Curse and capeweed have disappeared with different grazing strategies.

“The only real down side is that both fox numbers and kangaroo numbers are up, but overall the farm is in much better condition in just eight years and it is a great place to live and work.”

This project is supported by the Goulburn Broken CMA through funding from the Victorian State Government