

The latest news from the Barossa Improved Grazing Group

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Natural Resources  
Adelaide and Mt Lofty Ranges



Natural Resources  
SA Murray-Darling Basin



# The BIGG Bulletin

July 2015

## Pasture Update: Making Dollars and Sense

BIGG and the Grasslands Society of South Australia are excited to bring you the Pasture Update "Making dollars and sense from pastures and your farm business" August 25 at Nuriootpa.

We've brought together an all-star line up of speakers to provide you with the latest insights and research to help improve your productivity and profitability, and thanks to MLA, attendance is only \$25, including lunch!

### Featuring:

- Marcus and Shannon Sounness, MLA Challenge farmers, Amelup, WA: Role of daughter-in-law in the family farm and improving farm profit by turning off lambs at a lighter weight and focussing on kg meat/ha.
- Basil Doonan, Macquarie Franklin, Devonport, Tasmania: Farming and logical business decision making, focussing on profit drivers in a pasture based grazing system and the "myth" about getting big or getting out, and the relationship between farm size and profitability.
- Alan Humphries, Leader, National Lucerne breeding programme, SARDI, Waite Institute: New lucerne varieties and the place for lucerne on your farm.

- Jeff Braun, Agrilink Consultants, Clare: Productivity of cereals and canola for grazing and grain.
- Cameron Allan, MLA: MLA feed base research update.
- Therese McBeath, CSIRO, Adelaide: MLA funded current research. Phosphorus efficiency in pastures. Where does all the P go?
- Leighton Pearce, Growing solutions, Berri: Using drones to assess and manage pastures, livestock and water supplies. Drones will be on display
- Facilitated session in small groups What piece of information will you take home from today and use at home? What further information will you require (if any)?

**Date:** Tuesday 25 August, 2015

**Time:** 8.30am for 8.55 am start. Finish 3.30pm

**Venue:** Nuriootpa Football Club, Nuriootpa Centennial Park, Penrice Road, Nuriootpa

**Admission:** \$25 includes lunch and morning tea

**RSVP:** By Friday 21 August to Rebecca Barr ph 0402 788 526, click 'Register Now' or complete the [registration form](#)

**Further details:** Brett Nietschke 0432 804 389 or Tim Prance 0427 812 655

[View the event flyer](#)

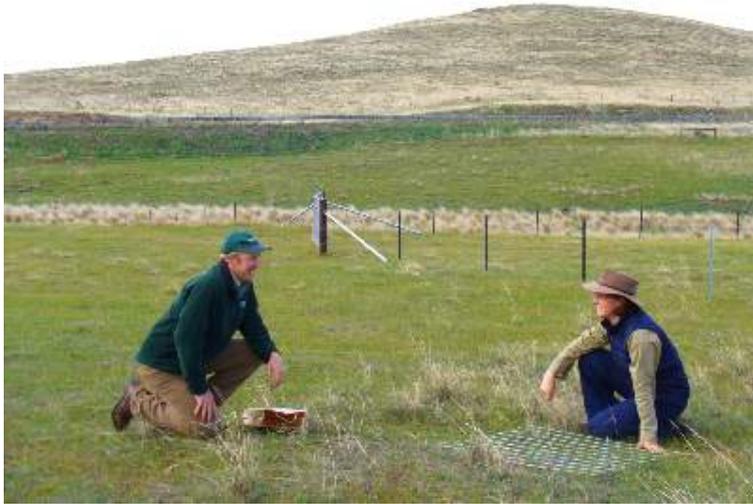
[Register Now](#)

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## Native grasses prove resilient after Eden Valley fires

*Project Leader Daniel Schuppan and Nicola Barnes, from Natural Resources SAMDB, monitoring pastures following the 2014 Eden Valley bushfires.*

*Source: Nicola Barnes.*



Two autumns after fire devastated grazing land in the Eden Valley regions, BIGG monitoring sites have demonstrated strong resilience of native grasses, with 90 per cent of burnt grasses having recovered.

In January 2014 the Eden Valley bushfire burnt 24,000Ha of grazing land, the vast majority comprised of native pastures. Some regions were subsequently burnt again in December 2014.

From September 2014, BIGG have monitored three sites, monitoring pasture composition, dry matter, ground cover and feed quality every two months, with assistance from ecologist Nicola Barnes of Natural Resources SA Murray-Darling Basin (SAMDB). The project is funded by Natural Resources Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges, Natural Resources SAMDB and the Australian Government.

Twenty-four different types of plants have been identified in the monitoring paddocks, half of those native and half introduced species. The dominant native grass species across the three sites are Brushwire grass, Spear grass and Wallaby grass, and the main weeds include Geranium, Guildford Grass and Wild Oats.

The monitoring site near Moculta was selected so that burnt pasture performance could be compared side-by-side with unburnt pasture. As would be expected, dry matter (DM) per hectare has been lower in the burnt pastures. This site had been heavily grazed due to the poor spring and over the 2014/15 summer the unburnt sites had 400-500kg DM/ha compared to 1200-1400kg DM/ha in the unburnt.

In native grass pastures, groundcover is critical to capture rain and protect the surface from wind and water erosion, especially on steep country. At the Moculta site burnt pastures performed poorly in terms of groundcover, with the burned area at 77 per cent in March 2015, compared to 85 per cent in the un-burnt area. A groundcover level of at least 70 per cent is generally considered acceptable, however 90 per cent is preferred.

However native grass cover had nearly recovered at the burnt site, at 27 per cent composition (compared to 32 per cent unburnt). In addition, litter cover was the same and the cover of broad leaf weeds was lower.

A different monitoring site, which had been burnt twice, in January and again in December 2014, was monitored in March 2015, much sooner after it was burnt. On this site the native grasses had survived and were re-growing but by June 2015 the burnt area only had 50 percent groundcover and 60kg DM/ha, compared to the area that had been burnt only once which had 83 percent groundcover and 1100kg of dry matter per hectare.

The feed quality of the burned native grass is now much higher than the unburnt, due to fresh growth compared to the old unburnt plants that have a mix of dead leaf and fresh leaf. When the monitoring sites were grazed, the livestock selectively grazed on the higher quality feed of native grass regrowth compared to unburnt native grass.

Figure 1 shows the composition of the Moculta burnt and unburnt pastures at the first monitoring in September 2014 and again at the end of May 2015. The Moculta site was burnt in the first fires, in January 2014.

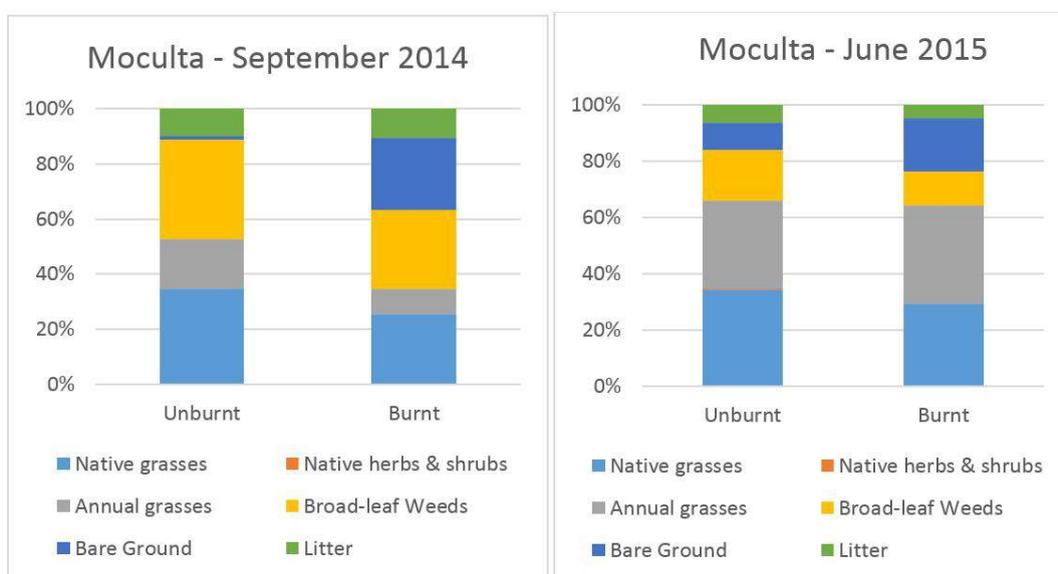


Figure 1: Moculta site, pasture composition in September 2014, compared with June 2015. Ground cover data collected by Nicola Barnes, Natural Resources SAMDB.

In the first monitoring period, the burnt pastures had significantly higher bare ground compared to the unburnt (dark blue bar, 25 per cent compared to 1 per cent), with 26 per cent fewer native grasses (grey bar). By June 2015, the composition is now closer to the un-burnt pasture, with only 15 per cent fewer native grasses.

The results so far show that native grass cover is reduced in the short-term following fire and there is a lot more bare ground. However in the longer term, the native

grasses recover and leaf litter returns, while the broad-leaf weeds are at least temporarily suppressed.

Fire rejuvenates native grasslands and there is a window of opportunity for land managers following a fire where careful grazing can be used to maximise grass recovery, protect soil and suppress broad-leaf weeds. Over-grazing will reduce the plant density and expose the soil surface, which will then reduce future pasture production and promote broad-leaf weeds.

For more information on managing native grasses a workshop and paddock visit will be held on August 12 to discuss results from a soil survey in the grasslands area.

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## Grasslands Soil Analysis Workshop

Following the 2014 Eden Valley bushfire, BIGG has been investigating recovery of the native grasses, including collecting soil samples from 20 paddocks within the fireground.

Guest speaker Steve Richmond, from Landmark Jamestown, will discuss:

- The results of the soil survey,
- How to interpret soil results,
- Targets for each key soil nutrient, and
- How to rectify soil problems.

The workshop will include a paddock drive hosted by project leader Daniel Schuppan to:

- Assess dry matter on offer and feed quality,
- Assess ground cover, and
- Visit grasslands fertiliser demonstration sites

### The details:

- Date: Wednesday August 12
- Time: 1pm-5pm
- Where: Meeting at Keyneton Hall
- Cost: Free

RSVP to Rebecca Barr by August 5 on 0402 788 526 or click 'Register Now' below.

[View the event flyer](#)

Register Now

## From the Inbox...

- One of our members is looking for work as a farm-hand in the Barossa area. He is a fit and healthy 21 year old with extensive experience with cattle and sheep, running his own Angus stud and sheep flock. He has worked for Elders, is part-way through a degree in agribusiness and has drivers and forklift licences. If you're interested in getting some help on your farm, please contact Bec on 0402 788 526 or [email](#).
- Retail Agriculture livestock trading workshop, Wednesday 29 July at Kapunda. [Read more](#).
- Making More from Sheep HR webinar series: [Safety](#) (30 July) and [Unpacking Packages](#) (20 August).
- SA Landcare Conference: September 14-16, Waikerie. [Save the Date!](#)
- Re-pasturing in August to tackle barley grass: Read more in the [Dairy SA Forage Update](#)
- The May-June MLA Feedback magazine features BIGG producer on page 10 talking about his experience in the Managing Climate Variability program. [Read it here](#).
- Trees for Life's ordering season closes July 31. The availability list and order forms can be found on their [website](#).
- Ag Bureau SA [Spirit of Excellence Award](#) - applications close August 31.

## Your BIGG Contacts

### Technical Facilitators:

[Brett Nietschke](#): 0432 804 389

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