

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

MARCH 2016

BIGG NEWS

We at BIGG have been busy working away on a few different fronts, here's an update on a few different projects:

- We have a NEW project! BIGG has been awarded funding to run an MLA Producer Demonstration Site for the next three years. Teaming up with Farmer Johns and Coopers of Mount Pleasant, we will be performing trials on a range of pasture types to assess which perform the best in our changing climate. We're looking for producers interested in being a trial site host – we will run one of the demonstration sites on your property, and in return we'll ask for your help in setting up the trial and monitoring the pasture performance. If you're interested, please contact Georgie on 0409 287 261 or by email georgie.keynes@biggroup.org.au
- The native pasture recovery project is mostly complete, with the publication of this [booklet](#) presenting the results of the monitoring, and a few case studies on producers' experiences. If you haven't seen it yet, there's also a video (www.biggroup.org.au) giving a summary of the project findings.
- BIGG will be co-hosting this year's AgTastic Conference, to be held at Yalumba in June, with the theme 'Managing your Natural Resources'. More details will be available next month!

Native Grasses Pasture Walk Rain Dance

At the Native Grasses Pasture Walk on the 9th March attendees not only learnt about the importance of feed budgeting, observed the native grasses fertiliser sites and learnt about methods to improve their soils, but they also did a rain dance which resulted in 50mm rain falling!

The importance of feed budgeting was highlighted with Daniel Schuppan, Livestock Production Specialist, running the group through a pasture measurement refresher and relating these results with actual livestock current feed requirements. The group measured an average of 1500Kg Dry Matter/Ha with 90% ground cover. The poor pasture quality means that ewes in mid to late pregnancy would require supplementary feeding to make up between 3 and 4 ME (Metabolisable Energy) if they were to run in these pastures. The pastures will be monitored again at the end of March to determine the production after the 50mm rainfall event.

Last year's fertiliser trials looking at the pasture response to single super at varying rates of 50, 100 and 150kg were observed and discussed. The results from 2015, showed no implication to perennial grass production however there was a visual increase in the growth of haresfoot clover at Sedan and sub clover at Pine Hut. These trials will be run again in 2016 taking into consideration the group discussion on the long term potential for increased growth of weed such as broadleaves and wild oats, which will now be monitored through pasture composition measurements.

These sites will also look at options for increasing production from native grass pastures through the winter using Progibb and by controlling Red Legged Earth Mite.

Steve Richmond, Landmark Agronomist at Jamestown then discussed soil test results from twenty samples taken last year across the hills zone between Mocolta and Cambrai. Soil phosphorous and sulphur were low on all properties which are likely to cause the main pasture production limitations. Therefore, in addition to the main trials which are utilising super phosphate to increase P levels, a small trial using gypsum to increase sulphur levels will also be done at both fertiliser sites this year to determine the cost effectiveness in terms of pasture production.

Further information on the 2015 fertiliser trials and soil test results can be obtained in the newly released 'Recovery of Native Pastures after Bushfire' Case Study Booklet available on our website www.bigggroup.org.au.



Native Pastures Monitoring

The monitoring for the Recovery of Native Pastures after the Eden Valley Fire Project has been extended to include all of 2016! Five monitoring's will take place to continue to provide producers with detailed information on how the lengthy recovery process is advancing.

Monitoring on January 25th found across all sites that the current feed quality is poor and summer active native grasses, which often provide improved feed values have had no summer rainfall to activate them. 50-55% digestibility (6-7ME per kg DM) and 5-6% protein is estimated. The heavily grazed pastures would be below 50% digestibility. Feed tested has 92% dry matter indicating some roughage value but little else.

Basic goal posts, or things to consider for native pastures in summer are:

Pastures - Aim to maintain above 80% ground cover and 800-1000kg of DM/ha to prevent erosion and promote quick plant recovery.

Livestock - Ewes especially in mid to late pregnancy on poor quality dry feed will be losing weight and will require supplementary feeding. Maintain ewe Condition Score above 3 - 3.5.

BIGG changes in watercourse rehabilitation thanks to plant communities

Significant changes in ground cover and site recovery have been observed at the halfway mark of the Barossa Improved Grazing Group's (BIGG) one-year watercourse

rehabilitation project.

The project, which received funding through a 25th Anniversary Landcare grant from the Federal Government, has seen the development of a site to compare the effectiveness of different plant communities at stabilising watercourse banks.

This includes four sections: native grasses, understory plants up to 60cm tall, trees and a combination of understory plants and trees. The 20 metre plots have been replicated and compared with control areas along a watercourse on dairy farmers Ben and Murray Klemm's property in Moculta, near Angaston in the Barossa Valley.

BIGG technical facilitator Georgie Keynes said the results so far had been impressive.

"Before the fencing and planting, the dairy cows would make the most of the green pick in summer in the moister conditions of the watercourse which led to pugging, mud and in some areas less than 20 per cent ground cover," she said.

"This area now has 100 per cent ground cover, with no pugging or watercourse erosion, which is a great turnaround after only 12 months."

Work in the first year has included fencing the site, removal of woody weeds briar rose and artichoke and planting of the tube stock species. The sole remaining plant from a vegetable garden which used to be at the site, a quince tree, has flourished with the stock control. However, weed control remains a problem.

"Caltrop, which was already present in small numbers, has thrived in the areas which were sprayed out for planting," Ms Keynes said.

"Ben and Murray have controlled it in the paddock using boom spraying either side of the watercourse fence and using a backpack spray pack within the watercourse area. As competition from the native plants increases, the caltrop is likely to reduce."

The Angaston Ag Bureau hosted a 'sticky beak' meeting in February to show members the site and learn about the importance of watercourse rehabilitation. The feedback was positive, with members commenting on how "amazing" it was to see how quickly the site had rehabilitated once the stock were removed.

Due to the early end to the season, plants were watered in October, December and January. Despite the conditions, there has been a 70 per cent survival rate of plants.

Natural Resources Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges district officer Julian Marchant said some plants would be replaced in favour of traditional species.

"The more traditional species including the eucalypts, acacias and most of the native

grasses have survived, while the more unusual species such as the lomandra and convolvulus have not,” he said. “We will replace these species with the more traditional ones for in-fill planting in 2016.”

In its second year, an adjacent section of watercourse will be fenced off to determine the cost effectiveness of machine direct seeding.

For more information visit www.biggroup.org.au

From the Inbox...

- The Angaston Ag Bureau Hogget Competition ([flyer here](#)) and Schools Merino Judging Challenge ([flyer here](#)) is on again, Thursday 31 March 2016.
- Brett Nietschke will be presenting for BIGG at the AgEx forum 7 - 8 April. See the [website](#) for further information.
- BIGG will be presenting at the SA NRM Science Conference, 13 - 15 April 2016, which is free to attend. See [website](#) for more information and to register.
- Producers are invited to the launch of the SA Sheep Industry Blueprint on Tuesday 12 April. See [flyer here](#).
- **\$470,000 on offer through the 2016-17 Regional Capability Community Fund** Individuals and organisations in rural, regional and remote areas across South Australia are encouraged to apply for grants to boost frontline emergency response in local communities. See [media release](#), [Grant Guidelines](#), [FFU Guidelines](#) and [application form](#).

Your BIGG Contacts

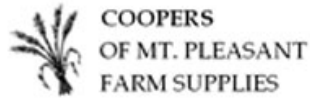
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