



BIGG's Recovery Process After Bushfires

Experiences from the Barossa Improved Grazing Group's recovery of native pastures after 2014 Eden Valley and Hutton Vale bushfires.

In 2014, areas of the Eastern Mt Lofty Ranges, near the Barossa Valley, were burnt in two separate fires. The Eden Valley fire occurred in January and burnt over 24,000ha between Eden Valley and Truro. The following December, the Hutton Vale fire burnt 1,400ha east of Angaston.

The vast majority of the areas burnt were pastures dominated by native grasses, made up of a range of species including native perennials, legumes and other plants. These pastures play a crucial role within local livestock grazing systems.

A community recovering from a major bushfire requires immediate and on-going support.

Although none of these types of events can be comparable, there are opportunities to learn from these significant events. The following suggestions arise from the experiences of Barossa producers affected by bushfire.

Community Welfare

- Utilise networks- stock agents, livestock consultants, Natural Resources, PIRSA, local rural businesses, agronomists, government agencies, local producer groups, neighbours, Agricultural Bureaus and State Farm Organisation are all examples of people who may be able to help.
- Keep in contact with other farmers affected by the fire to ensure opportunities are not missed and to provide a sounding board to help make the difficult decisions.

- Quick decisions are needed after a fire. It's important to sit down with everyone in the business and think hard about what options will be the best in the long-term. Include a farm advisor or stock agent to help work out the details.
- Get involved with community events and workshops which are valuable both in the workshop content, and in the opportunity to meet with neighbours and discuss approaches for recovery. This can be both on a farming level and a community level to include the whole family in the process.
- Finding the balance between providing an income and allowing the recovery process is difficult however should be managed with the long term gain in sight. This may mean turning stock off earlier, reduced stocking rates or obtaining off farm employment.
- Keep safety in mind, as stressful times can result in dangerous shortcuts being taken. Use safe work procedures when unloading fodder, dealing with falling trees, burnt out post holes and fencing.
- Look after yourself – you're no value to the family or farm if you burn-out. Take some specific breaks, engage in as much normality as possible.



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Immediate Recovery

- Destocking of the burnt area is immediate, options included agistment, containment (drought) lots – which were built in previous years and proved to be great value, utilising a sacrifice paddock or moving stock to other unburnt areas.
- Take advantage of donated hay, however be aware of the weed issues. After the Eden Valley fire, some producers fed in their containment lot to prevent possible weed dispersal across their property.
- Work out when you need hay, and if possible, only get it when you need it. It may be straight away but it could also be when stock return home from agistment.
- Take the time to inspect agistment paddocks; while agistment can be a lifesaver after a fire, it's important to check the quality of the paddocks.
- Consider which animals to send on agistment, it may be best to keep your more valuable or stud stock on the property and send other less valuable stock on agistment.
- Consider biosecurity when stock return from agistment – think about quarantining them when they return and shearing to prevent the spread of weeds and allow treatment for lice.
- Think about options to provide quick feed by planting a forage crop. This can also be beneficial in maintaining soil cover.

Long Term Recovery

- Consider whole farm planning when it's time to re-fence; look for opportunities for changing fencing, laneways, gateways, water points to facilitate fencing to land class.
- Consider new fencing materials, many producers are now utilising all steel products and electric fencing to prevent loss if another fire occurs.
- Monitor stock after the fire, particularly when lambing or calving to ensure teats were not burnt which can prevent rearing young.
- Bury water pipes to prevent burning in future fires.
- Most producers were under insured after the Eden Valley fire and would recommend regular insurance reviews.
- Blazaid, and numerous community and church groups are invaluable in shouldering the huge labour load.



Pasture Recovery

- Give pastures time to recover. After the Eden Valley fire all landholders destocked until after the break in the season which occurred in May 2014.
- Producers have found that livestock will preferential graze the burnt pastures compared to the non-burnt because of the fresh green shoots.
- Consider the use of temporary electric fencing in areas which are partially burnt to allow different grazing regimes.
- Pasture recovery is not just a one year process. Don't undo your good work from resting pastures in the first year by over grazing in following years. Continue to monitor and be tactical with grazing management depending on the season.
- After the fire it was thought two years would allow full recovery, however after two dry springs it appears this could take another one to two years.



The Barossa Improved Grazing Group (BIGG) received funding from Natural Resources Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges (AMLR), and Natural Resources SA Murray-Darling Basin (SAMDB) to investigate the recovery of native grasses following the fires and support producers in managing their pastures and grazing businesses.

A Case Study Booklet and Video are available on BIGG's website for detailed Producer Case Studies on the entire recovery process.

Further Information

www.biggroup.org.au

This information sheet is intended to provide information and provoke thought. No legal liability is accepted for the information, errors or omissions contained within it.