

Bushfire recovery drives future preparation

Environmental management case study

Summary

- Fire response and recovery and protecting sensitive farm areas.
- Importance of fencing and renovating pastures and the natural assets.
- Having a vision and a clear plan will help you manage adversity, make informed decisions and seek out opportunities for the future.

“We have realised that they have strong sustainability management practices. We know what we need to do to be in the right place for our business and our farm.”

Darren and Sharon Parish – Bodalla

FARM SNAPSHOT – ‘RIVERVIEW FARM’

Darren and Sharon Parish – Bodalla, Far South Coast, New South Wales

Darren and Sharon own a 790-hectare property at Bodalla, which incorporates a herd of 200 Holstein dairy cows and 2540 dairy beef herd. Three hundred acres of their property is remnant bushland. The main farm is supported by a nearby 540-acre lease block, where young dairy stock and the beef herd are run.

The Parish family has been farming here since 2009. It is a family-run operation, with Darren and Sharon working full-time on the farm with the support of a casual farm hand.

- The Parishes have completed fencing off all rivers, lakes and waterways on their property prior to 2020. They had approximately 800m of frontage to fence.
- The Local Landcare Service (LLS) has been to the property to assess the biodiversity of their bush block and found it to be in very good condition.
- The wetlands of the lake were surrounded by trees.
- Trees had also been planted along the main riverbank with the support of the LLS.

Farm system

- A dryland, pasture-based system with the herd calving all year around.

- Producing about 1.8 million litres per year that is supplied to Saputo.
- The pastures across the farm consist of annual ryegrass, clover, summer kikuyu and paspalum.
- In-concentrate is fed in the dairy and the Parish family feed fodder grown on the properties.
- The average annual rainfall is 530mm and some years they will be required to purchase extra fodder based on seasonal conditions.

Farm features

- Located on the Tuross River, which forms one boundary of the property.
- The Bumbo Creek and Bumbo Lake border their land as well as State Forest.
- There is a total of over 12.5 km of river, creek, lake and wetland frontage to their property.
- The farm has been impacted by natural disaster in the past three years.
- February 2020 – 70 per cent of the farm burnt by bush fire. Fencing (boundary and internal) and pastures were destroyed.
- July 2020 to current – up to 15 flood events – versus in a normal year expectation of 1–2 floods.

Business purpose

As part of completing the Our Farm, Our Plan program, the Parish family created a vision for their business with a focus on animal care and welfare to support the production of quality milk and beef.

Sharon and Darren are passionate about producing quality beef and milk as an output of their enterprise. In addition to these focus areas, they have a goal to maintain a sustainable and healthy environment.

With their property being surrounded by ecologically sensitive areas, they want to ensure they enhance and protect the rivers, lakes, wetlands and bushland. They understand the flow-on effect (literally downstream) that their practices can have on others (including oyster farms down river).

"When things are getting too hard, I try to write down five things I am grateful for. This is something I come back to when things get rough. It seems to work well for me and I am able to push through." Darren Parish

Practice change

Issues identified

- 1 In 2020, the bushfire that devastated the Parish's property also burnt much of their bush block and along the waterways. As part of their efforts, they were able to save some of the sensitive areas by building a firebreak during the fire.
- 2 Following the fire, they have been impacted by the emergence of new growth, but also the persistence of some weeds in the bush areas, including wild tobacco and fire weed. These were weeds they didn't have issues with prior to the fire.
- 3 The flood events of the past two years have created other issues which have slowed the fire recovery process. Flooding impacts have slowed fencing projects and pasture renovation, so they have had to do things in bits and pieces.

Changes made

- 1 Since the fire, fencing has been a priority not only to contain their stock (and manage pastures) but also to protect riverbanks and ecologically sensitive areas.
- 2 Engaged LLS following the fire, who provided great support and advice to reduce bank erosion, fencing projects, revegetation and weed control.
- 3 Implementing a weed identification and control program, with support from LLS. To minimise herbicide use, they are persisting with manual removal including mulching – monitoring for persistence will determine if they may need to resort to chemical use.
- 4 Re-use of effluent is an important focus to try enhancing sandy soils. Recycling organic farm wastes, with effluent and bought-in chicken manure, is being trialled with a view to improving poorer soil types on the farm.
- 5 Undertaking an environmental leadership program with a view to learning more about the different environmental markets and future opportunities to track carbon emissions and become carbon neutral.
- 6 Staying focused and writing down five things to be grateful for helped manage through the challenging times.



Benefits of the change

- Seeing re-growth in some of the fire-damaged bush areas.
- The focus on fencing has ensured that stock is excluded from sensitive areas and is able to graze on renovated pasture areas. This has enhanced milk production while allowing non-pasture areas to recover.
- Having an ongoing relationship with LLS meant that Darren and Sharon were able to receive good support during and following the bushfire.
- Participating in the environmental course has given Sharon some ideas and inspiration for the future.

The future

- To continue to explore the environmental markets that may be available with a long-term view on and know-how to become carbon neutral.
- Continue recovery projects such as fencing and tree planting to return sensitive areas back to pre-bushfire damage.
- Continue using and experimenting with organic waste and composting and reduce artificial fertiliser use.

Learnings

- Great support available from LLS and other organisations like them. Get in touch and build relationships, so they know you and your farm.
- Create a plan so that you can focus on the key areas of your business. They might not all be working how you want to, but you can use the plan to help you make key decisions and manage change.

- Dealing with adversity – prepare and plan carefully. Always try to make informed decisions.
- Stay positive – find five things to be grateful for each day. When things are really rough, write them down.

“We had a good relationship with the LLS people before the fires, so they were really able to help us out with different parts of the recovery because they already knew us and our farm.” *Darren Parish*

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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Scan the QR code for information about Dairy Australia's environmental programs.



Aerial shot of the Parish farm showing the extent of native vegetation, Tuross River and the Bumbo Lake.

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