

Preserving waterways for a sustainable business

Environmental management case study

Summary

- Comprehensive planning from the outset has Compass Agri on the path to success.
- Connecting with local groups, the team were able to begin fencing and planting out waterways to protect them from stock access and nutrient run-off.
- Ongoing water monitoring on the property has helped the team to understand their beneficial impacts on the water quality.
- Water quality on the property is high standard and supports a population of platypus.
- With the Compass Agri strategy focused on sustainability, the 'Clearview' farm team are focused on their goal of leaving the property in a better condition than when the team arrived.

"Water use and quality is a key driver behind our philosophy to do the right thing."

Ryan Ashby - Clearview

FARM SNAPSHOT – CLEARVIEW

Compass Agri is the owner of Clearview, at Gretna, Derwent Valley, Southern Tasmania.

Based in Tasmania and Victoria, Compass Agri manages agricultural assets across Australia. They work with a range of private and corporate clients to grow sustainable value-add investments for its investors and its farmers.

Clearview is situated on the outskirts of Gretna, Tasmania in the Derwent Valley. It is owned and operated by Compass Agri, which bought the property in 2016.

When Compass Agri purchased the 260-hectare (ha) property, it was operating as a dry-land sheep and cropping farm. Following the conversion to dairy, the farm now has a milking platform of 220 ha and milks approximately 600 spring calving cross bred cows.

Farm features

- The Clearview team consists of 4.5 full time staff running a herd of 600+ cows based on a spring calving system.
- Calving starts from the 1st August and is completed in 9 ½ weeks. This matches the grass growth curve, giving the cows a diet of 80 per cent grass and 20 per cent strategic use of supplements.
- The property has a spring fed dam and natural creeks which flow into the Derwent River. The land is undulating, and the soils are sandy loam.
- The property is irrigated with the use of pivots, K-line and soft hoses.
- Water is pumped up 90 metres from the Derwent river to a storage dam under a 1,600 million litre (ML) water allocation licence.

Business purpose

To ensure the sustainable management of Clearview, Compass Agri has the following environmental, social and governance priorities at the core of their values:

Environmental Land and Water Practices

- Water movement and nutrient levels.
- Agronomic practices.
- Vegetation and biomass.

People Management Practices

- Source and retain experienced and qualified staff
- Safety minded working environments and teams
- Investment in training, development and growth

- Robust human resource policies and procedures

Animal management practices

- Nutrient dense diet in line with animal needs
- Access to clean drinking water always
- Complete animal health and wellbeing

With these key principles in mind, the team at Clearview have a simple, overall objective of leaving the property in better shape than when they started.

"We had the perfect opportunity to make sure we did things right from the start."

Ryan Ashby

Practice change

Issues identified

1 The conversion to an irrigated dairy farm created many challenges for Compass Agri. The team also saw many opportunities to ensure this was done in a sustainable and efficient way through:

- effective use of irrigation water
- efficient use of fertiliser
- ensuring there wasn't any negative impact on the waterways
- increasing the native vegetation on the property.

2 There were very few trees or shelterbelts on the property, resulting in:

- limited shelter for the livestock and pastures during extreme weather (winter and summer)
- no buffer zones between the pastures and the water ways, resulting in higher loss of valuable nutrients into the waterways, impacting the quality of water of the dam, creeks and rivers
- limited opportunities for biodiversity across the property.

Without any irrigation, there was little pasture growth during the summer months .

Changes made

- Preserving and protecting the waterways on the property (and downstream) was a main priority with activities carried out from the beginning.
- Early on, the team engaged with local groups working on enhancing the waterways. This ensured the team received up-to-date, local advice and support on how best to manage the environment.
- Irrigation on the property was established with a 1,600 ML water licence using water pumped from the Derwent River to a storage dam.
- Waterways were fenced off from stock and planted out with native vegetation buffer zones.
- Water testing of the main dam is regularly undertaken.

- Over 5,000 trees have been planted on the property – including along waterways, springs, sensitive areas and as shelterbelts in paddocks.
- Nitrogen use has been limited to reduce nutrient run-off into waterways.
- To reduce the high levels of potassium in the soil, fodder beet has been grown as a summer crop for the livestock.



Storage dam for irrigation was established on the property

Benefits of the change

- The farm is a profitable, sustainably run enterprise with good access and use of irrigation water.
- Run off into waterways is minimised, improving water quality.
- Efficient use of fertilisers and recycled nutrients on the property.
- Soil potassium levels have been controlled using strategic summer fodder cropping.
- Biodiversity has increased following the planting of thousands of trees and protection of the waterways.
- Waterway health is sustainable with the success being evidenced by a population of platypus being regularly sighted in the farm's spring fed dam.
- The property is in a better condition than when it was purchased.

The future

- Native trees will continue to be planted in strategic areas across the property.
- The team will continue to implement a nutrient management plan to ensure effective and efficient use of nutrients and fertilisers on the farm.
- Alternative power sources and storage options are being considered with a view of reducing the enterprises power costs and carbon footprint.



Learnings

- The standard you walk past is the standard you accept.
- Keep it simple.
- Having an overall strategy and standard can help you to keep on track.
- Plan well.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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

