

Strategic plan informs infrastructure placement to enhance whole farm enterprise

Location: Poochera

Region: Western Eyre Peninsula

Industry: Mixed Farming

Annual rainfall: 300 mm, average GSR 225 mm

Issue: Reducing the effects of wind erosion on sand dunes and stock tracking to one water point servicing three paddocks in a dune swale system.

Key outcomes: Positive outcomes on land management issues by developing a Strategic Plan, a worthwhile tool for both short and long-term mixed farming goals.



Background

Jason Brace manages a 3000ha property near Emerald Rise north east of Poochera. The property is 70% arable and 30% stony outcrops and sand hills. Traditionally this property has been a mixed farm of wheat and sheep production, with alternate years of cereal and pasture. Retaining this mix is an important economic decision ...“Cropping can be a high input and high-risk proposition, with some year’s having poor spring rainfall and areas prone to frost damage. I saw benefits in having sheep in my farming system as a low risk option with consistent income from wool and lamb sales,” Jason said.

A 800ha block west of the homestead had been farmed in two sections, on a year in year out basis of wheat and pasture. Originally, Jason had planned to clay delve the dunes to reduce erosion potential however, there was not enough clay close enough to the surface to undertake this option.

There was only one good watering point to service the two sections causing sheep to track over sand ridges as the trough was placed at one corner of the property. An old water line afforded some relief to two outlying paddocks,



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but water leaks and calcification of piping were a problem and it needed replacing. The internal fencing also needed upgrading.

Looking to the future Jason wanted to maximum benefit from his sheep enterprise and recognised several factors needed considering. The ideal time to do some strategic planning – to rationlise watering points, having a good look at paddock size and incorporate any cell grazing and containment feedlot suitable.

The project

Following discussions with the Regional Landcare Facilitator, a Strategic Plan was developed to allow Jason the flexibility he had not had before with his stock and cropping program. The Plan was to reduce the negative impact of stock on the property by changing the layout of paddocks.

Central to the plan was laying a new pipe to the center of the block with a new 20,000l storage tank and trough. Building a large holding yard, which could double as a containment feeding area. New fence was also installed giving four defined paddocks for controlled grazing and cropping options. Each paddock could access the new centrally located trough, which supplies an excellent flow of cool water for the sheep year round.

Outcomes

Tips from Jason include ... "When I was working on the options available I found it an advantage to share my thoughts with others, when looking for solutions to manage the block more sustainably. This allowed an extra set of eyes, with wider experience, to help solve issues that are often put on the back burner. This resulted in practical steps to untangle the issues and help achieve a positive outcome," Jason said. "A Strategic Plan looking at the big picture with long term goals and then setting short term goals with a timeline and budget worked well."

In 2014 Jason was able to share his vision with local farmers at a "Sticky Beak" day on how to overcome these complex issue and provide an effective solution. Four years later Jason is pleased with the outcome and says, "The greatest advantage was the flexibility in grazing. The ability to shut off paddocks also gave me better control of grazing and lambing percentages have increased."

The future

In the future Jason plans to extend the water line north another 300 meters to a heavy flat to reduce stock trampling impact a vulnerable area. Jason commented "Seeing the benefits from this project inspired me to upgrade the sheep yards, and made me realise that a bit more effort towards sheep infrastructure makes sheep work easier, more efficient and more profitable. I would recommend others seek advice and develop a Strategic Plan as it has so many benefits.



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