

**The Effect of Native Vegetation
on Productivity**

**Brookside - Byrock
By**

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Brief History of Brookside

Location

Brookside is a western land lease in perpetuity, it is situated 5 kilometres north of Byrock on the right hand side going north on Mitchell Highway. I purchased Brookside in November 1974.

The drought ended at Xmas and I shifted onto Brookside on February the 4th of 1975 in time to keep the school open.

Stock

I purchased 100 head of cattle and had over 1000 sheep plus 5 horses and the usual homestead livestock, (plus 8 kids to help out). There was a large number of feral goats and wild pigs on the property along with 70 head of cattle belonging to Stan Douglas of Bourke.

Vegetation

The property was a mixture of scrub, mulga and native grasses. At this time it was possible to muster using a holden car and a lot of the property was traversed by this means. We also used horses to some extent as it was possible for them to traverse the paddocks as most of the mulga was short.

It was during the first few years after we arrived in Byrock that I was in the dept of agriculture and saw a paper on Byrock which stated that in the late 1800's the surveyor general's dept had sent a surveyor out and he recorded the following in his report to parliament "Standing on top of Mt Byrock I could see the Lyndhurst homestead roof glinting in the sunlight, with the creek beds picked out by the lines of trees". This leads me to the conclusion that this area was not densely burdened with the amount of scrub that now abounds in the district.

This report I would imagine would be in the parliament archives and so should be still available from there as the report that I read would have vanished during the Nyngan floods.

Vegetation and its effects

Encroachment

Over the years the Mulga has grown in height and has become a haven for the spread of wilga which has become the second most predominant shrub on the property together with turpentine and other woody weeds. Mulga fern is one of the most dominant species of plants in the understory as the trees have largely replaced the native grasses

Poisonous

Wilga is one of the trees most commonly touted as being suitable as a grazing tree, this is not true as I had large numbers of sheep die and when the dept of agriculture did the autopsies the results came back that the sheep had died from eating wilga as there was a build up of arsenic in the sheep's system caused by the sheep eating the leaves of the wilgas which contained arsenic.

Mulga fern is a member of the bracken family and is also a cumulative poison and is deadly to sheep, cattle, horses, goats. This plant has built up to plague proportions on Brookside.

Whilst it has not scientifically been proven the low lambing, kidding, calving has increased it proportion to the increased volume of mulga in the diets of the females and stock which become barren when adjusted on the clear country at girilambone produce of spring.

Stock grazing on the Mulga acquire a very bitter flavour and the keeping qualities greatly reduced.

Impact on production

As the shrub and Mulga has increased so the number of head of livestock which we are able to carry has decreased. The lambing percentages together with those of the cattle and goats has decreased.

Goats fed a predominant diet of mulga had a kidding of just 3 kids out of 500 nannies. I would like to see some trials done into the effect of mulga on fertility. Livestock are hard to find in the scrub. People do not like putting their stock on adjustment on properties that have a predominant Mulga and scrub base.

Wool prices in heavily scrubbed properties is at the lower end of the scale.

Droughts and implementation of legislation

Effect on Vegetation

Legislation has had the effect of allowing a lot of growth of vegetation which is not beneficial to the farmers. Legislation is not uniform in that too many acts contradict each other. Drought does not knock out the weeds nor does it kill the woody vegetation, rain fall tends to germinate many annual seeds and sufficient falls followed by no rain tends to deplete the seed bank and requires a lot of good years to replenish.

Effect on Production

Legislation works in many cases out here to reduce the productivity of the properties by preventing the clearing, cultivation, pasture improvements needed to improve both the carrying capacity and the income of the property.

Droughts cannot be prepared for due to the inability to crop and store them, make hay or ensilage or in any other way conserve fodder to help mitigate the effect of drought on the overall property.

Government Departments Implementation

Government Departments Implementation of the legislation is often to the benefit of the person implementing the legislation.

To get a clearing and cultivation permit in the western division has been for us a 27 year nightmare I have personally been told by a government department employee that if I phoned her regarding my application for a clearing licence my application would go to the bottom of the heap and I would never get one (I didn't whilst she was in office) and to date still have not managed to get one.

The aboriginal inspection has now got to the stage where by many farmers will not be able to afford to clear their properties see attached email.

Remedies

Automatic Right to Clear % of Native Vegetation

Each property should have an automatic right, to should the property holder wish, to clear up to 25% of an individual title , with out having to have a clearing licence or a cultivation licence.

Each right should be on a title not on a property base but on individual titles thus should a property consist of several titles the clearing should be on each individual title so that in the future should a title be sold separate the clearing done is already on that title not on another block but making the sold one inellegable, for clearing.

The department that is in charge of the clearing should have attached its own trained aboriginal site inspectors and a reasonable charge applied to inspect Properties.

Projected Increase in Productivity

Income from the gains in earning capacity, flow on benefits by having fodder for drought years, easier mustering , working conditions improved, Less stress on farm families due to increased returns.

Income should almost double with the increased lambing, kidding, calving % due to the increased proportion of pasture to scrub intake.

Social Benefits to the Community

The most notable benefit to the community will be the increased labour force which the right to clear will generate jobs for. Flow on benefits should flow to places like to local shops, schools and social events.