

“I WAS COMPLETELY ASTOUNDED BY THE VOLUME OF WATER”

David Tooke talks about flooding, sustainability and the help of the community at ‘Jilliby’

Nicole Maher, Murrumbidgee Landcare Inc

There have been a lot of changes at ‘Jilliby’ in the 17 years since David Tooke and his family purchased this 480 ha property. During their time at Jilliby, the Tooke’s have fenced out all of the creeks - around 20 km - and are in the process of fencing out the dams. Much of this work has been carried out with the assistance of Murrumbidgee Landcare’s Cross Property Project and the Riverina Local Land Services (then known as the Murrumbidgee Catchment Management Authority). The work has involved a series of projects designed to stabilise the riparian vegetation.

Fencing out the creeks has proven to be very beneficial, particularly for the swampy land in the back country. This area was inundated during the two severe floods of 2010, but the water was slowly absorbed into the soil, rehydrating it. The flats did not fare so well in the floods, with the four creeks that all converge on the property unleashing a massive amount of water here.

Says David, “I was completely astounded by the volume of water that flowed across the farm in the two floods, and the subsequent damage. Fences that had been in place for over 20 years were removed, the amount and size of timber that came through was unbelievable; the damage that was caused will take years to replace and repair”.

The Tooke’s run fine wool SRS® merino sheep and Charolais, Angus and Murray Grey crossbred cattle on their property, which consists of sandy loams rising to shale-based ridge country. In addition to the productive farming enterprises they undertake, they have also established an environmental stewardship arrangement to protect the Box Gum Grassy Woodland on their property. Researchers at the Australian National University have been undertaking a monitoring program of this area, and have found a wide range of woodland flora and fauna present, including some rare and endangered species.

The Tooke’s have also been involved in the Cross Property Planning project, which aims to build connectivity within and between adjoining properties in the region. David has found their involvement in this program to be both useful and enjoyable, saying “This has been the best program that we have been associated with, because of the information days and the quality of the speakers, the scope of projects included and the total environmental impact that is being created in the participants and their families and subsequently their farms”.

During their time at Jilliby, the Tooke’s have become active members of the community, hosting many field days and property inspections over the years. David credits his neighbours and the community with providing valuable guidance, local knowledge and new opportunities: “Having learnt my farming on the dairy farms of the south coast, I needed heaps of help to develop and establish the skills and knowledge to farm in this area. Neighbours, communities, and Landcare groups have been a godsend in very trying times and the projects that we have participated in over the years have allowed us to take positive steps. Liz and Hector McCallum, in particular, have been amazing and should be acknowledged for their tireless efforts for farming and the environment. The broader Tarcutta Valley Landcare Group have reinforced the message and provided the forum to have a wide range of topics discussed and information disseminated, and social interaction with like-minded people”.

The Tooke’s are now focussing on removing the damaged fencing following the floods. They are also working towards their farm plan of establishing the paddocks and water points for a rotational grazing pattern. Of the Cross Property project, David says, “this provides a new opportunity for the community to be involved in an informative and productive process”.



*Some of the damage along the creekline at 'Jilliby' following the 2010 floods
(photo courtesy of Rob Kuiper, Riverina Local Land Services)*