

Bellenbar

CASE STUDY

Property Snapshot

Bellenbar is a large grazing property at Fords Bridge in far western NSW, owned by Dave Hegarty and his wife Tracey. The Hegartys bought the property 25 years ago in a degraded state following intensive sheep grazing. The majority of the property is relatively unproductive, dominated by shrubby invasive native species with some small patches of good creek country. The Hegartys have been gradually improving it with the intention of returning the property to a more natural state of grassy open woodland and a more productive and efficient farm.

Location: Fords Bridge, Bourke Local Government Area, far western NSW

Size: 13,650 hectares

Enterprise: Currently carrying 1,000 goats, previously sheep and cattle

Challenge

The invasive native species on Bellenbar currently cover approximately two thirds of the property and are having a significant negative impact on its productivity and biodiversity. The property is dominated by dense shrubby species, mainly Turpentine (*Eremophila sturtii*) but also Narrow-leaf hopbush (*Dodonaen viscosa*



subsp. *augustissima*) and Budda (*Eremophila mitchellii*).

Competition from these species means there is little to no native grass cover, which has significantly reduced the property's grazing capacity. The lack of groundcover in the form of grasses is also contributing to poor soil health and lack of moisture penetration.

The Hegartys received a certificate under Land Management (Native Vegetation) Code for moderate impact clearing of Invasive Native Species on 8,955 hectares of Bellenbar. Impact on native plants that are not acting invasively is limited to incidental damage associated with managing the target invasive species. In addition, at least 10% of the treatment area must be retained, and the area remains regulated rural land to recognise the ongoing native groundcover requirements of this type of environmental management approval.

Work being undertaken

The Hegartys are undertaking the work to remove the invasive native species themselves gradually over the 15 year life of

the certificate. Mr Hegarty has built a rolling device he has named the 'scrubinator' to cut off the invasive native vegetation and leave it in place on the ground where it can break down into valuable soil nutrients. At the same time, turning over of the ground helps create a seed bed and promotes natural growth of native grasses through soil condition and rainfall use efficiency improvements. The Hegartys are removing the invasive native vegetation in a series of 1,200 ha paddocks which will then be fenced. He plans to develop three of these new blocks per year and progressively build up his goat herd and rotate it through the new paddocks as they come on line. Local supplies for fencing have been purchased locally in the Bourke region including 28 kilometres of apron hinge fence in the past 12 months.

"The thing is with these invasive native species is that they really strangle the country, they don't let the grass grow or let any air or water in. I feel despondent sometimes because I can have rain but it can't soak in"

- Dave Hegarty, Owner, Bellenbar



Local Land Services

CASE STUDY



"Naturally it should be open woodland with stacks of trees and we want to bring it back to that, with a great mix of native grasses. I got told by all my old neighbours that it in the past it was one of the sweetest blocks around and it had the best range of grasses. They told me the woody weeds take hold of the best ground first and that's my hope.

What we're doing is improving the country. By removing the invasive native scrub, the variety of native grasses will grow. While we know the invasive native species will grow back, we have plans to stock the property, reasonably intensively in a rotational system. Hopefully with managed stock we can beat the scrub in the long run."

- David Hegarty, owner, Bellenbar, Fords Bridge



Fact file:

- 13,650 ha property at Fords Bridge in far western NSW
- Currently carrying 1,000 goats
- Dominated by invasive native species including Turpentine, Narrow-leaf hopbush and Budda
- Significantly reduced agricultural productivity and profitability due to dominance of invasive native species, resulting from limited native grass growth
- Certificate approved under the Invasive Native Species section of the Land Management (Native Vegetation) Code for removal of vegetation on 8,955 hectares
- Woody shrubs will be cut off and the vegetation returned to the ground to improve soil condition and promote natural grass growth
- Managing stock in a rotational grazing system will help ensure the former scrub dominated areas are maintained as grassy open woodland.