

## Perennial Pasture Systems 10th Annual Study Tour; Gippsland; July 2018



PPS Study Tour supported by



*Report compiled by PPS Project Manager Rob Shea from information supplied by Gippsland host farmers, Lisa Warn, Samantha Monks, Simon Hunt & PPS study tour members.  
Photos; Rob Shea, Debbie Shea, Craig Altmann, Wayne Burton*

PPS is supported by



## 10th Annual Study Tour July 29<sup>th</sup> - August 1<sup>st</sup> 2018

### Gippsland

#### ***Introduction***

Since the group's inception in 2007, PPS has recognised the value in members visiting leading farms in other regions as well as being informed of research projects with tours of research facilities. In 2009, PPS implemented an annual study tour as part of the group's extension activities and since then has held single and multiple day tours within Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania and New Zealand.

At the planning meeting in February, it was decided that the 2018 study tour would be to Gippsland, Twenty six members participated in the study tour which, in addition to farmers, included an agronomist, and two seed company representative. Members of the Gippsland Plains Pasture Group joined the PPS group for dinner on the Sunday night and for the Monday farm tours. Group members had visited PPS farms in 2011 and 2015 when Samantha Monks organised group tours.

The region visited was being affected by a long dry spell with only 150 mm of rain recorded in some areas for the first eight months of 2018. PPS acknowledges the willingness of the host famers to allow PPS to visit in such tough times.



*Group facilitators Rob & Sam  
doing the introductions on the Sunday night*



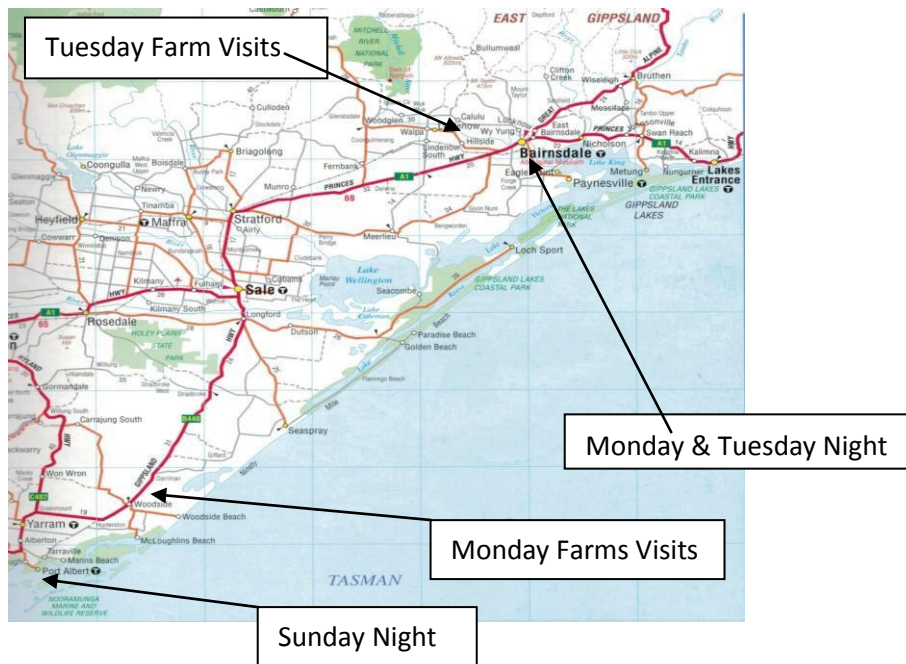
*PPS President Tony Roberts with Sam Monks  
at Ballon Park; Woodside*

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# 10th Annual Study Tour - Gippsland

## Study Tour Locations



### Brief overview of Gippsland (supplied by Sam Monks)

The Gunaikurnai people are the traditional owners of Gippsland. There are now approximately 3,000 Gunaikurnai people, whose territory includes the coastal and inland areas to the southern slopes of the Victorian Alps. Gunaikurnai people are made up of five major family clans: Brataualung, Brayakaulung, Brabralung, Krauatungalung and Tatungalung.

Before permanent European settlement, the area was visited by sealers and wattle bark gatherers. Samuel Anderson, a Scottish immigrant from Kirkcudbright, agriculturist and explorer, arrived in Hobart, Tasmania in 1830, and in 1835 established a squatter agricultural settlement on the Bass River in Gippsland, the third permanent settlement in Victoria (then called the Port Phillip District).

Further European settlement followed with separate expeditions to the Gippsland area. In 1839, Scottish explorer Angus McMillan set up a cattle station at Numbla Munjie near Omeo. McMillan then set out to find grazing land and a harbour on the Gippsland coast. In 1840, McMillan set up another cattle station near the mouth of the Avon River but was still unsuccessful in his attempts to get to Corner Inlet. In 1841, he finally reached the coast where the Albert River flows into the inlet. McMillan was involved in massacres of the Aboriginal people in retaliation for their herding of cattle.

In 1840, Polish explorer Count Paul Strzelecki passed through Numbla Munjie and followed McMillan's trails to the west, giving his own names to many natural landmarks and places. Following these expeditions, the area was officially named "Gippsland", a name chosen by Strzelecki in honour of the New South Wales Governor, George Gipps, his sponsor.

Gippsland covers an area of 41,556 square kilometres (16,045 sq mi); Gippsland is generally broken down into the East Gippsland, South Gippsland, West Gippsland, and the Latrobe Valley statistical divisions. The climate of Gippsland is temperate and generally humid, except in the central region around Sale and Bairnsdale, where annual rainfall can be less than 600 millimetres (24 in). East Gippsland had a dry spring in 2017 and the 2018 rainfall to the end of June was less than 150 mm in some places compared to the average of 245mm.



### **Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> August**

Study tour members made their way to Port Albert in car pools through the dairy pastures of West Gippsland which were growing quite well with good winter rains. The situation changed quickly as people entered the sandy, coastal plains where producers were suffering from much reduced rainfall and a "green drought".

The first night was spent in the cold, windy but picturesque village of Port Albert.

#### **Port Albert, the Port Fairy of the East (much smaller though).**

Port Albert is a small coastal community within the protected waters of Corner Inlet & Nooramunga Marine & Coastal Parks. It is adjacent to Bass Strait, east of Wilsons Promontory and 13 kilometres south of the township of Yarram. The Gunaikurnai people are the traditional owners of Gippsland, made up of 5 clans. The Brataualung clan area includes Tarra Warackel (Port Albert).

Port Albert is one of Victoria's oldest sea ports established in 1841 following the wreck of the paddle steamer "Clonmel" and the arrival of inland explorer, Angus McMillan. The town has a collection of Georgian and Victorian style heritage buildings including the General Store dating back to 1856.



#### **Wildfish**

The Wildfish restaurant in Port Albert opened specially on the Sunday night, delaying annual holiday closure by one night, for the PPS group. Members of the Gippsland Plains Pasture Group joined, and slightly outnumbered, PPS members for dinner; Monday's host farmers also attended. An excellent meal and social evening was added to with a presentation by restaurant owner Michael Hobson who has been involved in the fishing industry for several years. He is also active in coastal management issues and spoke about the cooperation between farmers and fishers which has seen improvement in fish habitat. Michael has also been involved in fishing industry policy with governments and spoke about the need to present your industry in a positive way and the need to be patient but persistent; a good policy for agriculture as well.



*Michael Hobson addressing the group*



*PPS President Tony presenting Michael with some land based produce from the PPS region; Red Rock Olive Oil and Bests Shiraz*

*Agricultural Conditions; Lisa Warn – Lisa Warn, Ag Consulting P/L*

*Lisa has extensive knowledge of East Gippsland agriculture and was a participant on the study tour; PPS invited her to do a presentation on the Monday night discussing farming in the region and some of the constraints that producers have to deal with.*

#### *Key Points*

*Rainfall averages 600 mm annually but can fall at any time of the year. Unlike most of Gippsland, the region receives most of its rainfall from the east and requires an east coast low pressure system to drive the moisture inland.*

*Australian east coast lows (known locally as east coast lows and sometimes as east coast cyclones) are extratropical cyclones. The most intense of these systems have many of the characteristics of subtropical cyclones. They develop between 25° south and 40° south and within 5° of the Australian coastline, typically during the winter months. Each year there are about ten "significant impact" maritime lows. (Source Wikipedia)*

*The region has mild winter and summer temperatures and can be green all year round.*

*This hasn't been the case in 2017 and 2018 as there has been a serious rainfall deficiency. Large rains can follow dry periods and rains of up to 150mm are not uncommon when this happens.*

*On the plains the soils are sandy loams and some soils along the coast are old sand dunes. Most soils are naturally deficient in major and trace elements.*

*The combination of the variable rainfall (poor autumn breaks/failed springs/summer rain) and sandy soil types (low P,K,S, Moly, copper) can make it a very difficult environment for sub clover to germinate and grow well each year. Sub clover content of pastures can be low in many years although when a good autumn break does occur it will be a good clover year. The poor autumn breaks are the main reason for poor clover growth in those years - the summers are hot enough for sub clover seed to break dormancy. Wet summers can cause germination & seed can be wasted as it won't survive for autumn; most people sow several cultivars of sub which have different amounts of hard seed.*

*Lucerne is well suited to the region and is used in mixes with grasses in pasture establishment, although summer active cultivars of fescue and cocksfoot can outcompete it. White Clover does not persist.*

*Ryegrass, fescue and cocksfoot are the main grasses and kikuyu is used to harvest summer rains and provides good ground cover on the very sandy soils. There is a small area of heavier soils in the district on which phalaris has been grown. Some farms have had phalaris staggers and/or sudden death problems in sheep. Cobalt (rumen bullets or pasture spray) can be protective against phalaris staggers, but is not commonly used in the area.*

*Wet summers can cause worm control problems with Barbers Pole Worm prevalent in the region.*



*PPS President Tony, presenting some PPS gifts to Lisa after her presentation.*

**Monday 28th August**

**Farm Visit 1**

**Property: Balloong Park**

**Location: Woodside**

**Farm Size: 970 Ha**

**Owner: Ashley, Andrea, Noel & Jill Walpole**

**Enterprise(s): Self Replacing Herefords**

The Walpole's conduct a 600 cow Hereford breeding operation on Balloong Park and dry conditions meant that plenty of supplementary feeding was required this year. 440 yearlings from eight months old are turned off annually, while 160 heifers are kept for herd replacement. Balloong Park stock are sold into Coles or JBS grass fed accredited marketing programs which means that no grain feeding can be undertaken. The audit programs don't allow stock to be treated with HGP's or antibiotics and require animal welfare, drought and management plans to be submitted. The two market outlets specify different weight ranges giving Ashley a bit of flexibility in their marketing and both have a premium price over the normal market.

Short term ryegrass forms a large part of the grazing program as well as supplying hay and silage options for stored feed. Ashley aims to have two years hay requirements in storage. Perennial ryegrass and cocksfoot form the perennial pastures and phalaris pastures play a role having been long established on heavier soils, which have cracking clays with gilgai formations. Sub clover has been established in all paddocks but Ashley expressed frustration with its performance in recent years; Lime has been added to the fertiliser program and he is keen to see what response it brings in the pastures.



*Ashley Walpole*



*Good farm; no bull*

After a discussion on the farm management and an inspection of a new ryegrass pasture, the group moved to a separate part of the property which bordered the bush and sand hills which separated the paddocks from the ninety mile beach and the ocean. The paddocks salt marsh which was fenced off as part of a Yarram Landcare project; this vulnerable area has now rehabilitated improving water quality flowing to the sea and providing habitat for vulnerable wildlife including the Orange Bellied Parrot; none were sighted by the PPS group but we hope that they return soon. Balloong Park was a great example of focused management and good animal welfare practices and marketing as well as showing good Landcare practices.



*Saltmarsh project with cattle and coastal heathland in the background*



*Yearlings near the fenced off saltmarsh (photo Craig Altmann)*



## **Farm Visit 2**

**Property: Warrigal Creek**

**Owner: Elizabeth (Libby) Balderstone**

**Location: Darriman**

**Farm Size: 1600 Ha**

**Enterprise(s): Wool, Prime Lamb, Beef. Centre Pivot Irrigation for Lucerne Hay Production and Fodder Crops**

After an excellent smoko on the deck of the historic "Warrigal Creek" homestead, the group gathered to hear from Libby Balderstone. Libby commenced her talk acknowledging the traditional owners of the land and telling the story of a dark piece of Australian history - the Warrigal Creek Massacre which occurred on the property in 1843.

### **Warrigal Creek Massacre**

In July 1843 Ronald Macallister was killed by Aboriginals near Port Albert. The Scottish settler and pastoralist, Angus McMillan, led a group of around 20 settlers to attack and kill several groups of GunaiKurnai people across a number of days. The group was known as the "Highland Brigade". Some historical accounts assert that around 60 people were killed, but other survivors said the number was 150-180. The statistical discrepancies likely emerged because McMillan's group killed Aboriginal people at five different locations in the area.

A witness, Willy Hoddinott, wrote the following in 1925: "The brigade coming up to the blacks camped around the Waterhole at Warrigal Creek surrounded them and fired into them, killing a great number, some escaped into the scrub, others jumped into the waterhole, and, as fast as they put their heads up for breath, they were shot until the water was red with blood. Hoddinott said that more than 100 Aboriginal people were killed on that day.

Historian Peter Gardner, in a review of all accounts of the massacre, wrote that McMillan and the Highland Brigade aimed to wipe out all the Aboriginal people in the area. Gardner concludes that McMillan's group probably initially killed two family groups at Warrigal Creek waterhole and then a few days later killed another 60 people at the mouth of Warrigal Creek, then killing three other groups at nearby Freshwater Creek, Gammon Creek, and Red Hill. (Source; Wikipedia)

It was clear that Libby felt deeply about being the custodian of the land where the massacre took place and she said that she always tells the story to farm visitors to ensure that this part of history is not forgotten. A documentary on the event has recently been made and was partly filmed on the property.



*Smoko at Warrigal Creek homestead*



*Libby discussing management in the paddock*

### **Warrigal Creek**

Libby's custodianship of the land is also clear with the numerous Landcare and land management projects completed over the years. The farm was under the sea until recent geological times and extensive salinity control demonstrations have been undertaken as have large areas of tree planting. Tall Wheat Grass was established in saline areas but Libby is aiming to remove it and replace it with more suitable salt tolerant species.

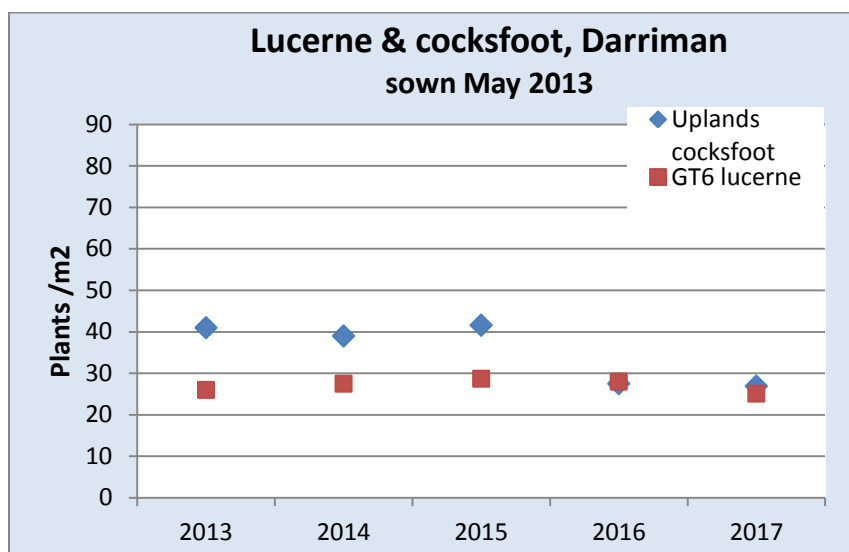
The property joins the environmentally sensitive Jack Smith Lake State Game Reserve which borders the Ninety Mile Beach and areas around the lake have been reserved as conservation areas.

Libby has recently employed the Growth Farms group as a management service to enable her to take a step back from day to day management.

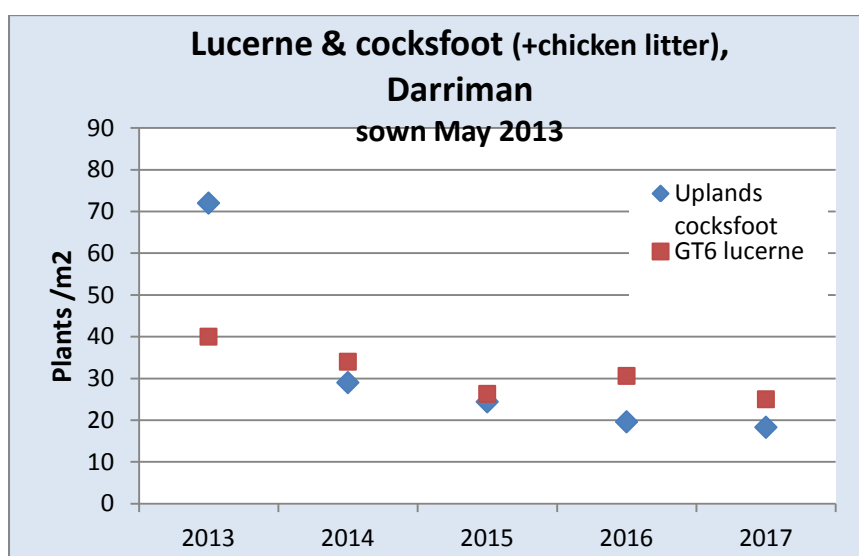
A fine wool Merino flock, prime lamb and beef breeding operations are conducted on "Warrigal Creek" complimented by centre pivot irrigation accessing ground water. An extensive pasture establishment program planting drought tolerant perennials has long been part of the "Warrigal Creek" management program. With lucerne/ cocksfoot mix, lucerne/fescue mix & fescue, rye, cocksfoot and phalaris pastures. Sub clover is added to pasture mixes but Libby expressed some frustration with its performance in recent years. Fodder crops for lamb finishing and lucerne for hay and grazing are grown under the centre pivots. A targeted fertiliser program includes around 150 kg/Ha of single super annually and lime is applied to lucerne paddocks prior to establishment.

Libby was a participant in the Yarram Yarram Landcare Network; Drought Tolerant Perennial Pasture Project which commenced in 2009. The trial pastures were inspected as part of the farm tour. Lisa Warn, who was the consultant on the project, provided some results from the "Warrigal Creek" sites.

Producer & location	Pasture sowing date	Pasture species
1.Elizabeth Balderstone, Darriman	Control - May 2013	Stamina GT 6 lucerne, Uplands cocksfoot
	Trial - May 2013 (chicken litter trial -litter applied after sowing)	Stamina GT 6 lucerne, Uplands cocksfoot



Paddock	Stocking rate DSE/ha
Control - May 2013	16.6
Trial - May 2013 (chicken litter trial)	24.6



Paddock	Estimated gross margin \$/ha
Control - May 2013	\$499
Trial - May 2013 (chicken litter trial)	\$739

After the farm tour, the group returned to the homestead for an enjoyable lunch in the winter sunshine, unfortunately Libby and the local farmers had been getting too much of that. Further discussions were held with Libby and farm manager Callum Steele before the tour group headed for the day's final farm visit.



*Young heifers doing well despite the dry conditions*



*Libby & PPS President Tony*



### **Farm Visit 3**

**Property: Bindawarra**

**Location: Giffard West**

**Enterprise(s): Wool, lamb, Merino stud, cattle trading**

**Owners: Steve & Lisa Harrison**

**Farm Size: 1,380 Ha, including leased and partnership land**

Steve started his farming career with the purchase of 70 Ha when he was seventeen; Lisa and Steve now manage nearly twenty times that area. The farm tour started on a 400 Ha farm which is owned in partnership with a silent partner. Cull Merino ewes are joined to White Suffolks as a lamb operation and cattle trading is undertaken when conditions are suitable; they weren't at the time of the PPS visit due to the prolonged dry. Steve gave a summary of the business operation which in addition to this block included the Merino operation on their home farm and a low production lease block. A very productive perennial ryegrass and sub clover was inspected and Steve discussed the use of kikuyu on the property.

It was then a short drive to the stud operation; Steve and Lisa aim to grow a bale of wool a day and they were well on their way in 2011 when they were offered a purchase option on the Bindawarra Merino stud and commercial sheep. They had been using Bindawarra genetics for a long time and had numerous successes in wether trials; Steve also did their ram shearing, so he had a good insight into the quality of the sheep. The stud owner, Murray Toland from Omeo unfortunately fell ill and couldn't continue with the stud, so Steve and Lisa decided to accept the offer to purchase it; a brave move with the state of the wool industry at the time.

The current high prices for wool means that their decision is paying off, but not without a lot of hard work and progressive thinking. The 700 ewe stud produces 100 rams for sale annually with an increasing number of poll rams making up the number. Stud sheep are muscle scanned in addition to all the wool measurements and DNA testing is used to confirm the poll gene in the hornless section of the flock. EID and an auto drafter have made the stud recording more precise. Bindawarra rams are entered into sire evaluations to compare the stud's progress against their competitors.

Biosecurity is a high priority on Bindawarra and the Harrison's have leased an area of blue gums to ensure that the stud is isolated from other sheep.



*Jodie Greene, Ben Greene, Joe Kilpatrick and Ann Howell inspecting the Bindawarra genetics*

The commercial side of the Merino operation has a stocking rate of 10 dse/Ha and they have implemented an eight month shearing interval. Dairy cows are agisted on the property in good seasons; not this year!

PPS members heard a great story of ambition and dedication and also had a close inspection of the Bindawarra rams that Steve and Lisa put on display for the group.



*Dry winter conditions*



*Mick Greene thanking Steve & Lisa*

**Monday**



*PPS member Peter Howell showing Don Belcher (Woodside) & Lisa Warn some photos at Warrigal Creek*



*Neighbours (not quite); Simon Hunt from SPS; Gippsland grew up at Mt Boswell, Ararat. Rod Vearing operates Mooneys Gap; the next door farm. They weren't there at the same time though.*



*Balloong Park*



*Rod Vearing (reaching for the cheque book?) at Bindawarra*



*Warrigal Creek homestead 1865*



## Seaspray

After the final farm visit it was about an hour's drive to Bairnsdale and most of the group chose to detour via the village of Seaspray, situated on the 90 Mile Beach. The beach is actually 154 km (94 miles) long and stretches from Port Albert to Lakes Entrance.



*90 Mile Beach at Seaspray*



*Matt Kindred & Simon Brady on about half a mile of the 90 Mile Beach (photo; Wayne Burton)*

## Bairnsdale

The estimated population of Bairnsdale urban area was 14,887 at June 2016. The city is situated on the Mitchell River and is the commercial centre for the East Gippsland region. The origin of the city's name is uncertain; legend has it that a Scottish settler named Macleod was so impressed by the large number of children; the offspring of his stockmen, that he called it Bairns-dale, or "valley of the children".



Dinner was at the Bairnsdale International and Lisa Warn gave her presentation on the local region's agriculture.



**Tuesday 31<sup>st</sup> July:**

**Farm Visit 5**

**Property: K & J Alexander**

**Owners: John & Jess and Ken & Judy Alexander      Location: Walpa**

**Farm Size: 755 Ha**

**Enterprise(s): Lamb, Beef Breeding**

K & J Alexander family runs 755ha beef and sheep property in Lindenow, much of which has been in the family since 1878. Ken and Judy have been running the farm since they married in 1974. After a career off-farm, son John and daughter-in law Jess returned to the property in 2009. Their involvement in the farm has resulted in a more business-oriented approach, but has also created the need for the generation of a second income from the farm. The challenge for the family has been to convert a farm from sustaining one family to supporting two families. The 415 ha home property has 130 ha under irrigation from the Mitchell River and runs 2000 composite, self-replacing ewes and 80 replacement heifers. John pointed out that irrigators, including large vegetable farms, take only 3% of the annual river flow; the river flows into the Gippsland Lakes so best practice management is applied by all users.



*Irrigated ryegrass and white clover  
lambing paddock*



*Centre pivot pastures*

The Alexander's are developing another 340 ha at Lindenow South, where they calve down 220 Angus cows in August selling weaners into the local Bairnsdale store market.

Irrigation under two centre-pivot irrigators gives flexibility in terms of finishing stock irrigated on Italian ryegrass which has plantain, chicory, clovers and Hunter hybrid brassica added to the pasture; 700 lambs are finished under each pivot. Other irrigated areas have bike shift laterals and the pastures are ryegrass and white clover based which carry 35 dse/Ha at lambing, achieving the 150% lamb annually.



*L-R; Wendy Harrington, Ken Alexander,  
Joe Kilpatrick and John Alexander*



*Smoko was enjoyed at the end of the farm tour  
overlooking the Mitchell River.*

The lighter sandy, loam soils on the property have kikuyu based paddocks bordered by shelter belts of trees. John had been sowing oats and ryegrass after each rain in the dry season but concluded that conditions were too dry to warrant the expense. They had been purchasing hay for the cattle since late 2017 and had sold off 60 PTIC older cows as a response to the dry. Paddocks on the home farm had all been limed and are well fertilised; urea is used to provide sufficient feed for lambing ewes. John is working on paddock subdivision aiming for 20 Ha on the dry land and 5 Ha on the irrigation. The farm was a good example of adding value to an existing property to allow for family succession.

### **Farm Visit 5**

**Property: Bulmer Farms**

**Owner: Bulmer Family – Andrew Bulmer; Managing Director**

**Location: Lindenow**

**Farm Size: 600 Ha**

**Enterprise(s): Vegetables**

The original Bulmer Farm was a WWII soldier settler block set up as a dairy farm on the Mitchell River flats in 1948 before being converted to vegetables in 1989. Andrew Bulmer had no desire to enter the family business when he left school and disappeared to Melbourne for a few years; in 2003 he changed his mind and returned and ended up as managing director. Bulmer Farms has now grown in size to nine farms and nearly 600 hectares; Andrew was the ABC "farmer of the year in 2017.

After a processing factory closure in Bairnsdale some years ago made the farm crops of peas and corn unviable, Bulmers decided to focus on salad vegetables. This saw the business grow by 400% and employing a staff of 120 people which rises to 180 in the summer picking season. The cropping season goes for nine months and at its peak 50 tonnes of baby spinach and 50 tonnes of salad mix leave the farm weekly in addition to the 100,000 stalks of baby broccoli. Much of the produce is destined for McDonalds (20% of their lettuce requirements) and Coles, produce is picked at night; washed, packed and transported to arrive for sale in Melbourne, Sydney and other destinations within 24 hours.



*Andrew Bulmer with baby broccoli*



*Group members showing more interest in salad than they do at home*

Andrew has worked to have Bulmer Farms at world's best practice with overseas study and engagement with plant breeders, mostly based in Holland, to get plants suited to the Australian climate. They now combine with four other vegetable farms to export to ten different countries. An outside board of management has been appointed to oversee the business operations.

After an outline of the business, Andrew took the PPS group through the processing facility and explained the level of effort that goes into staff training, packing and transport that ensures a fresh and healthy product arrives to the buyer. He also spoke about research into turning baby broccoli stem waste material, currently being used a cattle feed, into a powder with health giving powers for use in smoothies; bound to be a hit with hipsters!



*Rocket; lots of rocket*



*Lettuce beds*

It was then into the paddock and Andrew discussed the timeline of the vegetables grown with baby broccoli taking three months from planting to harvest, lettuce takes 12 – 14 weeks in winter but only eight in summer. Rocket comes down from a winter 8 weeks to 14 days in summer. Soil moisture probes monitor the moisture available to crops and GPS target variable fertiliser management looks after soil nutrient levels; drones are used to check plant health.

While Andrew was obviously proud of the Bulmers Farm salad produce, he was honest enough to say that it still needed salad dressing to get the best flavour from it.



## **Farm Visit 6**

**Property: Emu Park**

**Owner: Shaun Beasley**

**Location: Lindenow South**

**Farm Size: 3,600 Ha**

**Enterprise(s): Angus beef and Merino enterprise running up to 20,000 sheep and 1,000 breeding cows.**

From his first purchase of land in 1982 stocked with sheep bought for a dollar, Shaun has built a large enterprise focusing on fine wool Merino and a beef cattle breeding operation. Stock numbers have been reduced in 2018 due to the prolonged dry with some older and dry stock sold.

Shaun has concentrated the sheep operation on fine wool Merinos cutting 5.5/6kg of 17 micron wool; 1<sup>st</sup> cross lambs have been produced on Emu Park but the variable seasons do not allow the lambs to finish in most years. The 7,000 ewe flock has been reduced to 6,000 this year and normally has around a 50% twinning rate.

The cow numbers are also down this year and will have a split calving, which is the normal practice on Emu Park; yearlings not required for the replacement herd are sold at 10 months of age.

Rams and bulls are bred on farm using A.I. with ABV's and a custom index used for final selections. Shaun has measured the success of the sheep breeding by entering 60 wethers in the Wagga trial which had the Emu Park sheep measuring very well in the important parameters.

Stocking rates average 14 dse/Ha and short term forage pastures of oats and annual ryegrass supplement the longer term pastures, although this year's April sown oats germinated poorly in the dry season and won't add much to the system this year. Phalaris has been used on much of the property but animal health issues (sudden death and staggers) created many issues and had poor persistence. The phalaris problem was studied but no cause was found as to why it created more problems on Emu Park than in other areas. Perennial ryegrass and white clovers don't persist either and perennial pastures are now sown to Yarck and Megatas cocksfoots or fescue with sub clover. Victorian ryegrass is sometimes used as a cheap short term fix.

Kikuyu is sown on sandy ridge areas of the farm which has replaced bracken and taken the grazing from 0 Dse/Ha up to 20 dse/Ha in these areas, whilst maintaining good ground cover. The kikuyu was collected from cuttings and spread on the sandy areas; the first sowing was a totally manual operation involving pitchforks, which Sean declares put his son off farming forever during a school holiday harvest.



*Sandy ridge planted to kikuyu*

Shaun has a high level of farm financial recording, analysis and enterprise risk assessment and keeps machinery expenses to a minimum; "if it rusts or depreciates, I don't want it" he said. Pasture inputs are a high priority though and Shaun says that "the fertiliser bill should exceed the bank interest bill annually". The farm has an average pH of 5.5 (water) and no aluminium issues, so lime is not normally part of the fertiliser program.

Two full time employees are part of the 30,000 dse operation and Landcare is an important part of the farm; 2,000 trees are planted annually.

Shaun and Maria Beasley's daughter is PPS member Bianca Kilpatrick from Allanvale South; Great Western.



*Plenty of info from Shaun over lunch*



*Tree plantings on Emu Park*



### **Farm Visit 7**

**Owner: Brody Kennedy**

**Location: Goon Nure**

**Enterprise(s): Dairy**

**Farm Size: 140 Ha**

Over the last two years Brody Kennedy has converted a rundown beef property into a dairying operation milking 250 cows. Brody's operation had grown to a 600 cow dairy over the past ten years over two farms but a divorce settlement forced a down sizing and re-evaluation of his business. He is now planning to combine dairying with a free range egg operation as well as being a full time dad to his young children.

The farm had only had 200 ml of rain for the year but an isolated fall of 40 mm about a month before the PPS visit had turned things around somewhat and Brody had been busy establishing annual ryegrass and oversowing other pastures with oats and barley. The pasture base of these paddocks are lucerne, chicory and plantain which receives a limited amount of irrigated water; the underground bores have a moderate salt content restricting their use on pastures.

Brody concentrates on the soil cation balance and is looking to improve the water holding ability of his soils which dry out rapidly; he uses the "Albrecht" method of soil management and has been applying large amounts of lime or dolomite depending on soil tests.

The "Albrecht System of Soil Fertility" refers to the principals used to develop the system of testing by American Professor William A. Albrecht. The system aims to have the soil composed of 4% minerals, 5% humus and 50% pore space. Ideally, 50% water and 50% air occupy this pore space. Soil nutrient needs are determined and supplied based on the deficiencies and excesses measured there. When there is too much of one element in the soil, it will inhibit the availability of other required elements. When there is too little of a required element in the soil, supplying that element will help to reduce any that are there in excess. Supplying what is missing in terms of measurable nutrients is the first key to controlling any excesses in each particular soil.



*Some extra nutrients ready for spreading*



*Brody discussing his pasture system*

Urea and Gibberellic Acid are used to boost winter pasture growth and maize will be grown with irrigation for silage this year. The cows are supplemented with hay, silage and grain; the cows were receiving a total grain ration at the time of the PPS visit with the 5kg/hd/daily combining with the pasture to put condition on the cows which had lost a bit of weight during the long dry. Brody uses a composite breed which are more adaptable to the variable conditions and have the ability to gain weight rapidly.

Brody uses an intensive pasture rotation which he says "grows grass" and speaking as a dairy farmer commented that "long rotations are just set stocking with some stock movement".

While the current milk price of around \$5.80per kg of milk solid is considered low, they are still profitable at Brody's with his cost of production around \$5.00, although he mentioned that the dry years set things back.

After a look at the milking in action, the group toured the farm and inspected some of the impressive pastures now making good growth after the rain a few weeks previously.



*Cows waiting their turn in the dairy*



*Oats sown into pasture*

**Tuesday**



*Getting right into study touring; Stuart Robinson in Brody Kennedy's dairy pasture & Ben Greene in the irrigated area at Alexander's "pasture good enough to roll in"*



*Duncan Thomas doing the thank you over smoko at Alexanders*



*PPS President Tony appeared to get some "Popeye" like powers after viewing the baby spinach at Bulmer Farms*



*Emu Park; Shaun's yellow Kelpie has heard it all before*



## Bairnsdale

The overnight stay was again at Bairnsdale and dinner was enjoyed at the impressive double storey Grand Terminus Hotel. The day's host farmers were guests of the PPS group and Darren Hickey; Ag Vic, Bairnsdale and a couple of locals who are friends of Mal Nicholson also joined in.

The final day saw the group leave Bairnsdale to make their way back to their own areas and greener pastures. All were hoping that our host farmers receive some much needed rain before too long.



*Grand Terminus Hotel; Bairnsdale*

### PPS 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Study Tour Participants

Craig Altmann; AGF Seeds, Horsham  
Wayne Burton; Mt Dryden  
Jodie Greene; Elmhurst  
Martin Harmer; PGG Wrightson, Ballarat  
Wendy Harrington; Mt Cole Creek  
Peter Howell; Amphitheatre  
Joe Kilpatrick; Great Western  
Ian Lawrence; Addington  
Mal Nicholson; Concongella  
Michael Roberts; Elmhurst  
Stuart Robinson; Ballarat  
Rob Shea; PPS Project Manager, Ararat  
Rod Vearing; Ararat

Simon Brady; Rhymney  
Ben Greene; Elmhurst  
Michael Greene; Elmhurst  
Paul Harrington; Mt Cole Creek  
Ann Howell; Amphitheatre  
Simon Hunt; Stephen Pasture Seeds, Stratford  
Matt Kindred; Stawell  
Maureen Lawrence; Addington  
Corey Price; Eversley  
Tony Roberts; Glenlofty  
Debbie Shea; Ararat  
Duncan Thomas; PGG Wrightson, Ararat/Melbourne  
Lisa Warn; Lisa Warn Ag Consulting; Melbourne

*All tour costs were met by the participant's contributions and the tour grant; no PPS funds were committed to the tour.*

### PPS Thanks;

Lisa Warn; Warn Ag, Simon Hunt; Stephen Pasture Seeds, Darren Hickey; Ag Vic Bairnsdale and Samantha Monks for their assistance in organising the study tour.

Host farmers and guest speakers

Dion Borg from GHCMa for his assistance with the funding application to support the study tour.

Mick Collings from Allflex for providing the tour name tags.

Car pool drivers for the use of their vehicles





### **Key Messages from Study Tour**

The host farmers and others in the region were experiencing 18 months of below average rainfall and this was having a severe effect on pasture growth and quickly diminishing on farm fodder supplies.

The unpredictable rainfall patterns make it a difficult area to manage with long wet or dry periods requiring careful planning regarding enterprise mix, carrying capacity and stock sale decisions

The region's sheep and cattle producers are relatively isolated from the main (non dairy) pasture based agricultural areas and this affects the amount of research and extension that they are able to easily access.

The distance from grain growing regions adds extra expense for transport when purchasing grain for supplementary feed. This reinforced the need for long term feed requirement planning.

The long term planning for expansion and improved productivity was a focus on all the host farms and provided inspiration to study tour participants.

Groups like PPS and the Gippsland Plains Pasture Group can play an important role in getting research and demonstration projects to the region's farmers as well as supplying a good social role in sharing ideas.

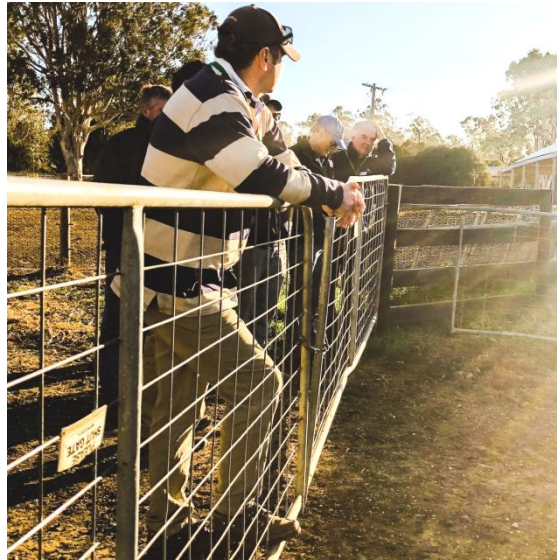
PPS should explore the possibility of a study tour to a warmer climate (Wendy Harrington; in the cold wind in Gippsland).

***The 10<sup>th</sup> Annual PPS Study Tour has been supported by Glenelg Hopkins CMA, through funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Program.***



***PPS acknowledges the continued support of the Wimmera CMA in supporting the PPS Project Manager role.***





*PPS President Tony reflecting on the study tour  
at the final farm (photo; Craig Altmann)*

## **Notes**