Property Snapshot

Strathalynne is a grazing property that has been in the Chaffey family’s hands since the 1950s. Richard Chaffey took over from his father in 1981 and while in the past it stocked sheep, it is now beef cattle operation. Mr Chaffey’s children work off-farm and it is likely the property will be sold in coming years. Mr Chaffey is planning for his retirement by ensuring Strathalynne is a viable prospect for the future.

Location: Attunga, about 30 kilometres north of Tamworth, north-west NSW

Size: 600 hectares

Enterprise: Beef production, running about 150 breeding cows

Challenge

As far back as the 1950s, Strathalynne was open woodland. Despite decades of active, rotational management of woody vegetation through activities including sheep and fire management, the shrubby Woodland has been regrowing, reducing the productive area of the property. This is partly due to cessation of fire and change from intensive sheep grazing to cattle in the 1980s. Of particular concern is a 140ha block which contains a sheltered hilly zone and acts as the breeding paddock as part of the property’s overall management strategy. Due to regrowth, that area has become less and less viable and carrying capacity has been significantly reduced.

Work being undertaken

Of the 140ha treatment area, vegetation will be thinned from about a third of the block. The steeper, more environmentally vulnerable country will be retained as Grassy White Box Woodland, an endangered ecological community.

Under the certificate, Mr Chaffey is allowed to remove trees down to certain age which is determined by trunk diameter. In addition he has chosen to retain groups of younger, healthy trees for stock shelter.

The work is planned to take place over a five year period, including removing the vegetation, applying fertiliser and allowing natural grass regeneration. The works are estimated at between $25,000 and $50,000 including the cost of operating machinery and time spent in doing the vegetation removal and pasture preparation.

For more than ten years, Mr Chaffey has been working to try to manage the regrowth but has not been able to undertake these works legally until now. Mr Chaffey is preparing to retire and needs certainty about the property’s future in order to get his affairs in order.

Mr Chaffey has been given approval to manage regrowth with a certificate under the Land Management Code, Part 4, Division 3 - Continuing Use. The assessment was based on evidence of ongoing landscape management and was demonstrated by historical imagery, property records and farm visit data.

“It has just become so overgrown I can’t run my cows in there because there’s not enough feed. The vegetation removal that I’m allowed to do under the new legislation will allow me to open up about a third of that back country and get it back to reasonable native species grass production. This will contribute significantly to the viability of the property.”

- Richard Chaffey, Owner, Strathalynne
“This legislation has given me the flexibility to do what I want to do. Getting this approval is an achievement because it gives me security to carry out the work. It means I can go ahead and manage my farm environmentally and I don’t have to worry about someone knocking on my door and telling me I can’t knock a tree over. I have done everything by the book. I don’t want to remove vegetation from environmentally sensitive areas. If I ruin the environment, I haven’t got a future.”
- Richard Chaffey, Owner, Strathalynne

Fact file:
• 600 ha property near Tamworth, north-west NSW
• Currently running 150 Poll Hereford breeding cows
• Use of the Continuing Use section of the Land Management Code to manage regrowth and encourage native pasture growth
• Following the works the breeding herd will be slightly increased.
• A change in management will also be introduced which will allow cows to be carried longer on the cleared areas, enabling calves that are usually sold as weaners to be finished on other parts of the property
• The works will increase the carrying capacity by about a third on the treatment area itself and an estimated 10-15% gain in production across the enterprise.