Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development
GOVERNMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Australian Government
Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Future Drought Fund

Southern Rangelands Revitalisation Program

The Baston Family at Jimba Jimba Station

Demonstrating regeneration at scale with people and livestock

August 2025

Acknowledgments

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The program started in 2021 and aims to support pastoralists to investigate and implement long-term solutions for on-station improvements in rangeland condition, land productivity and livestock management in WA's southern rangelands.

We acknowledge that the contents of this document do not necessarily reflect the views of contributors.

Cover image: The salt gully catchment on Jimba Jimba Station
Images supplied by Will Baston

For further information, visit **dpird.wa.gov.au/southern-rangelands-revitalisation-program**

For more information on Soils for Life email **info@soilsforlife.org.au** or visit **soilsforlife.org.au**

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About the case study series

This case study is part of a series that showcases 7 pastoralists in Western Australia who have participated in the Southern Rangelands Revitalisation Program (SRRP) run through the WA Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD), funded by the Australian Government's Future Drought Fund – Resilient Soils and Landscape program and the WA State Government's Climate Resilience Fund.

The Southern Rangelands Revitalisation Program aims to support pastoralists to investigate and implement long-term solutions for on-station improvements to land condition and livestock profitability in WA's southern rangelands. This program takes a systems approach to rangelands revitalisation involving:

- the regeneration of palatable, productive, perennial vegetation
- landscape function and hydration restoration
- total grazing pressure control
- livestock management.

The program provides support to pastoralists to learn as a community through organised group meetings with like-minded pastoralists, funding to access expertise and training, and grant funding for revitalisation projects.

The 7 pastoralists in the case study series received training and specialist support in the first phase of the program, and were then successful in applying for funding for an on-ground revitalisation project.

Soils for Life has prepared each case study in collaboration with DPIRD and the pastoralists. Each pastoralist story provides an insight into their unique rangeland environment and context, challenges and motivations, and ways they are adapting and innovating to build resilience. The case study has a focus on practices implemented through the SRRP, but provides context about each pastoralist's broader management approach.

Station facts

Location
Yinggarda Country, Carnarvon, WA

Climate
Hot dry summer, mild winter

Average annual rainfall
226 mm[1]

Agro-ecological region
Arid[2]

Property size
150,000 ha

Elevation
100–136 m

Social structure
Family operated pastoral lease

Enterprise type
Beef cattle

Landscape
Scrubland in the lower riverine plains

Soils
Stony hills and plains[3] and sandplains (with some dunes and hardpan wash plains)[4]

Land systems[5]
Bidgemia, Jimba, Yalbago, Billy, Sandiman

1 Source: Station records kept since 1904 and **SILO**. Rainfall is highly variable and unpredictable from year to year.
2 Agro-ecological region is determined according to **Outback Australia - the rangelands**. Extreme variability of rainfall is a defining feature of southern rangelands and has a significant impact on the challenges and solutions being explored in the SRRP.
3 Sourced from **Natural Resource Information, WA DPIRD**.
4 Source: Will Baston.
5 Land systems of the SRRP project area. Sourced from the Rangelands baseline surveys - Western Australia.

SRRP project highlights

Goals and approaches

- Improving grazing management of cattle through the principles of Holistic Management and rotational grazing
- Improving drought resilience, livestock condition and profitability
- Demonstrating that good livestock management can help to regenerate the rangelands

Practices implemented

- Built fences to create a new paddock in a previously over-utilised area of the station
- Installed nine trap yards[6] at water points to support grazing management in a previously underutilised area of the station
- Implemented earthworks to repair erosion gullies and slow the flow of water through the landscape

6 Trap yards are also often referred to as TGM, Total Grazing Management yards, self-mustering yards.

Initial insights

- Improved confidence to address on-ground issues through SRRP training courses and connections with other pastoralists in the project
- Trap yards are reducing mustering costs and improving calving rates and mustering efficiency
- Looking forward to being able to see the benefits to the pastures through the ability to offload cattle in a timely manner and better control grazing pressure

> As custodians of the land, we love the property, we are bound to the property, my whole childhood was here. I have realised it's not just about the land, it's also about the people.
>
> **Will Baston**

Meet the Baston family

The Baston family has been operating pastoral leases in the midwest and Gascoyne regions of Western Australia for 6 generations. Martin and Virginia Baston took over the pastoral lease on Jimba Jimba Station in 1977. In 2020, their son Will returned to the station to contribute to station management, along with his wife Maggie. Will describes experiencing the whole range of farming emotions over these 4 years, as they experienced boom and bust cycles of floods, fire, drought and low prices.

Jimba Jimba Station historically ran cattle, sheep and rangeland goats. In 2007, wild dogs[7] started to become an issue, and by 2009, sheep numbers were being reduced so rapidly by dog attacks that it became impossible to recover through breeding replacements. As a result, the family made the difficult decision to sell the remaining sheep. The goats also disappeared due to predation by wild dogs, and cattle have since been the sole enterprise at the station.

The Bastons run Senepol, Santa Gertrudis and Shorthorn cattle, crossbreeding these and targeting the domestic market. Will explains, 'We look for an animal that is fit for purpose for our rangelands, that is low impact, that will also grow quickly so they are not having a long life on the property. They are raised, they are fattened and then they are sold, that way we can keep their numbers down.' Will believes that cattle are good for the regeneration of the country, and that 'sheep and goats were more destructive'.

Still, there are challenges to running cattle in this environment. Will explains how 'running cattle alone is difficult, increasing numbers brings problems with soil degradation. It can be tough to maintain numbers and keep the nutritional value of feed available for breeding cows. Cows are always pregnant, which makes it hard to reduce numbers because you can't transport pregnant cows long distances.' They also have the challenge of high costs ($70/head) to get cattle to market.

Maintaining groundcover through optimising stocking rates in relation to available feed and seasonal conditions is a priority. 'We get 40 days of 40°C, and 40 of them in a row each year. If you don't have groundcover, the ground gets toasted,' says Will.

While Will recognises the value of the intergenerational family pastoral legacy and the knowledge that has been passed down from previous generations, he is introducing different approaches to grazing and rangeland management to address these challenges.

7 In WA, wild dogs are defined as dingoes, dingo/dog hybrids, and feral domesticated dogs.

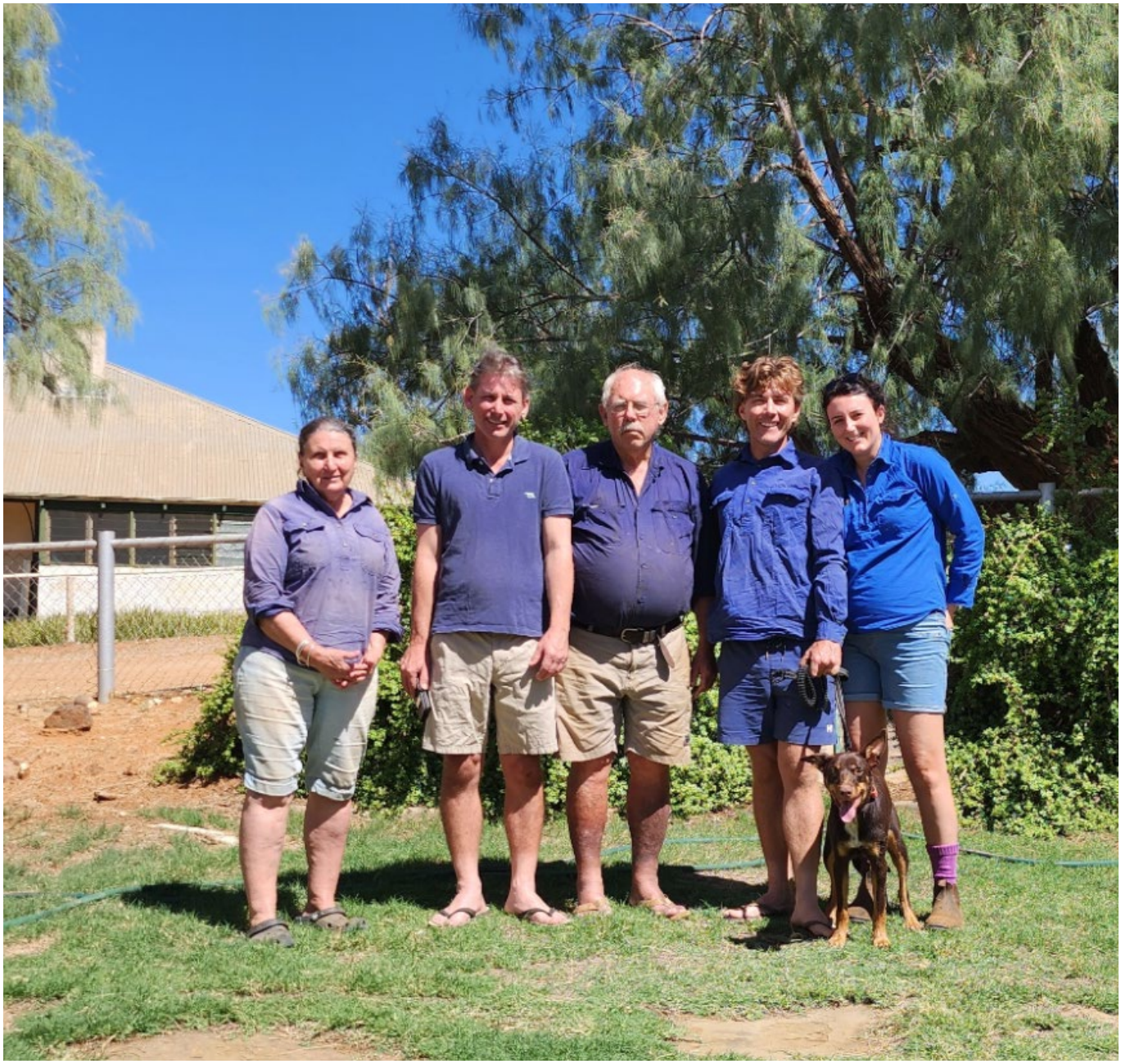

Image 1 The Baston Family. Left to right: Virginia Baston, James Baston, Martin Baston, Will Baston and Maggie Baston

Will's approach has been inspired by Holistic Management training he completed as part of the Southern Rangelands Revitalisation Project. Will and Maggie also travelled for 3 months in Africa in 2024, where they spent a day with Allan Savory, the founder of Holistic Management and met a lot of herders.[8]

Will describes being on a massive learning journey that has made him 'curious to explore how to herd animals, make money and also move stock in an intensive grazing system that has long-term rest at large scale'.

8 Implemented in Africa as a central practice of Holistic Management, herding (also called shepherding) is the practice of human herders constantly moving groups of livestock across grazing landscapes to create high intensity short duration grazing impact. In Australia, fencing is used to create similar grazing conditions. Read more in **Holistic Management by Alan Savory**.

Southern Rangelands Revitalisation Project on Jimba Jimba Station

The Southern Rangelands Revitalisation Program (SRRP) aims to support pastoralists to investigate and implement long-term solutions for on-station improvements to land condition and livestock profitability in WA's southern rangelands.

Motivations and goals

The Baston family's revitalisation vision is to: 'demonstrate that by undertaking intervention works and implementing Holistic Management, it is possible to effectively build a drought resilient landscape that will create the foundation for an enduring healthy natural capital to support a profitable, thriving and sustainable livestock pastoral operation over the next 10 years and into the future.'

Jimba Jimba Station initially had 22 sheep paddocks, which have not been effective in controlling the grazing of cattle because the cattle walk straight through these fences. The lack of fencing to control the movement of cattle is creating uneven grazing pressure across the station, with some areas over-utilised and others under-utilised. Erosion is also impacting productivity and profitability. Along with undertaking remediation works on eroded areas, Will hopes that implementing a Holistic Management approach where rotational grazing will control grazing pressure in key areas of the station will support the regeneration of the landscape, improve cattle management and maintain cattle condition through drought.

Will was also keen to demonstrate how regeneration could be achieved at scale in the rangelands, with people and livestock as the key drivers of positive change. 'It's not about the cattle, it's not just about that one aspect, it's the whole picture,' Will says. Contrary to a commonly-held view that rangelands would be better off without people, Will wants to show that good land management can lead to environmental and animal productivity benefits. Will hopes that the fencing and changed management will increase groundcover by 25% by 2028. He plans to use the monitoring sites set up during the project to demonstrate the benefits.

In 2021, Jimba Jimba received record rainfall of 550 mm for the year. Will recalls that he 'saw very quickly that we should have had more precipitation captured in the soil, clearly our drainage system was so effective at draining the land'. Learning about the water

> We need to do better as an industry. We need to do better as a collective. And we need to tell our story. Getting that message out to the general public.
>
> **Will Baston**

cycle in the Holistic Management training was further motivation. Will explains, 'You can't guarantee the rain. It's what you do with it.'

The networking with other pastoralists that the program provided was also a key motivator for Will. He reflects:

> 'There are so many great things you can do, but you've only got so much time and money. You can't do everything. The collective ability to work with a multitude of properties in the project is great, all trying different things. If something works on someone else's property, I might give it a go, but I don't have to take all the risk.'

Will also has a strong sense of the changing economic environment. He explains:

> 'In 2024, it is much harder to achieve projects than it was in 1977 when labour costs were low and material costs were high in price. Then in the 90s and 2000s, labour costs were high and material costs were low. Now we are finding both materials are high, labour is high, everything's high and the commodity price is low.'

Practices implemented

Paddock fencing

As part of the project, a new 17,000 ha paddock was created in a previously underutilised area in the south east of the station by installing a 26 km 4-wire (3 barbed, 1 plain) fence.

Will chose the south east area of the station for the paddock because of its potential for regeneration. When it rains, a lot of water passes through the area relatively quickly, so maximising groundcover will help reduce runoff and erosion. Cattle also tend to migrate to the area for easy access to water and for the high quality of vegetation, including species such as Gascoyne mulla mulla (Ptilotus polakii), ruby saltbush (*Enchylaena tomentosa*), earlobe saltbush (*Chenopodium gaudichaudianum*), other saltbushes (*Atriplex* spp.), bluebush (*Maireana* spp.), buffel grass (*Cenchrus ciliaris*) and ribbon grass (*Chrysopogon fallax*). Alejandro Carillo, a fourth-generation rancher from the Chihuahuan desert in Mexico, visited Jimba Jimba in 2023 and encouraged them to focus

on the best areas of the station first. ‘We did extensive planning and realised that this would be our best bang for buck in terms of starting a rotational grazing program,’ explains Will.

The fence crossed Jacobs Gully creek line, which was a challenge as regular water flows could destroy any infrastructure located within the flow path. Will came up with the idea to have a ‘floating fence’ that would rise and fall with the water flow and would not allow cattle to move in or out of the paddock during these events.

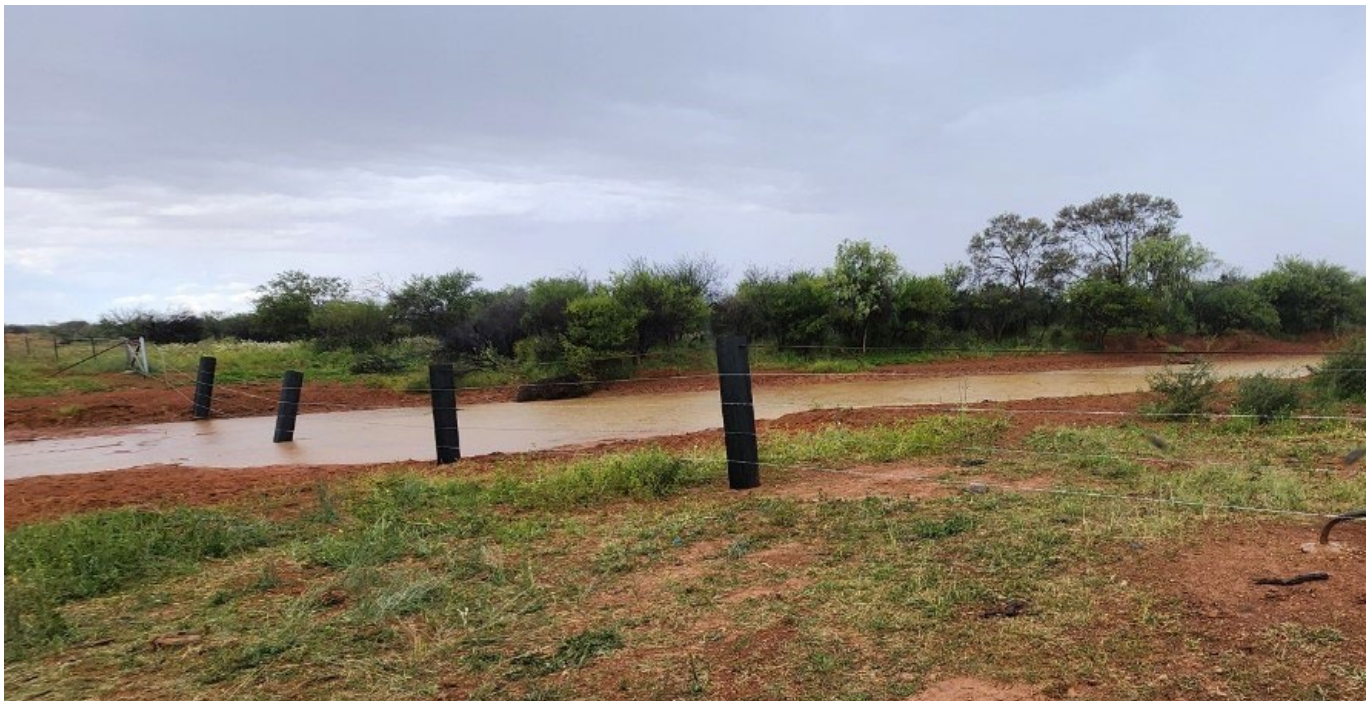

Image 2 ‘Floating fence’ built across the Jacobs Gully creek line

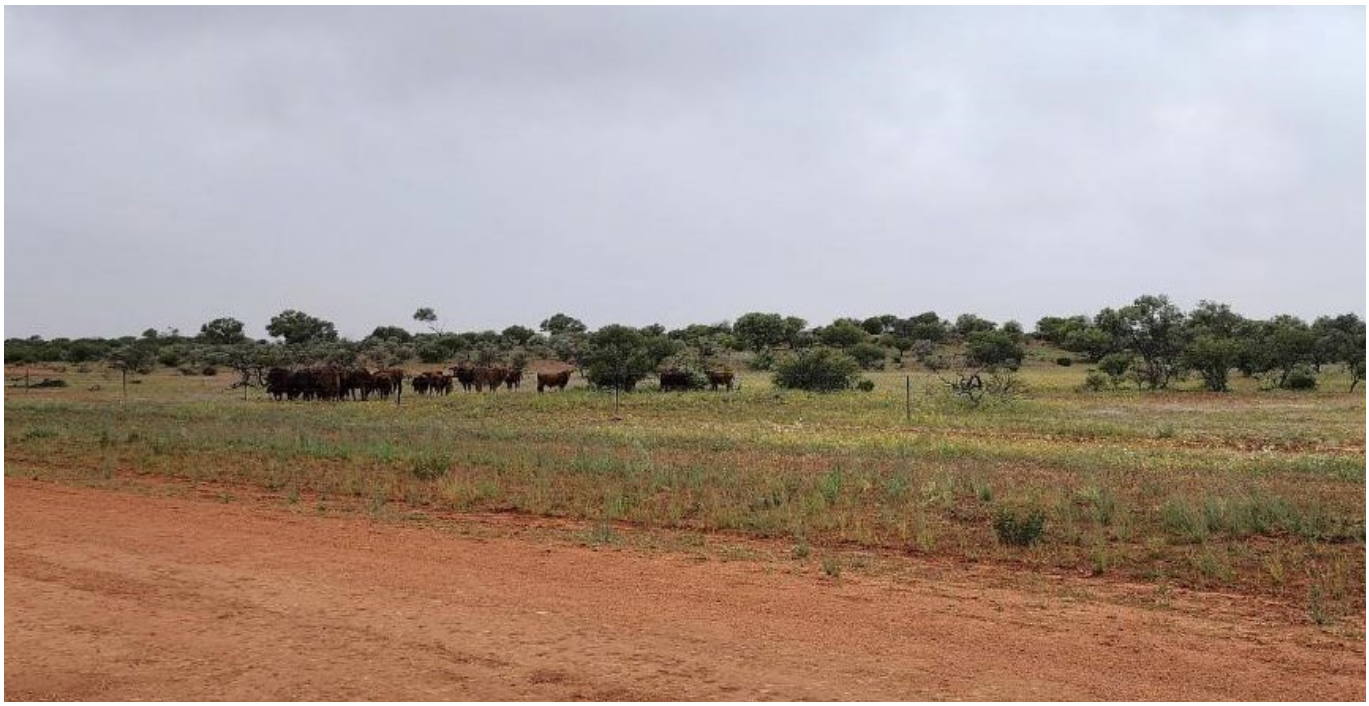

Image 3 Completed section of fence line

‘Since fence construction, we have mustered all the cattle out of the paddock to allow the vegetation to rest and recover. We anticipate that the paddock will be utilised for a brief graze period before another rest period in the winter growing season,’ says Will. Going forward, the Bastons plan to remove the cattle each year during the growing season in May, June and July instead of grazing all year round, to allow the area to rest and recover so that palatable, productive, perennial vegetation can regenerate. A trap yard has also been constructed to control and manage cattle numbers within this new paddock area.

Image 4 New fence allowing rotational grazing for effective grazing management

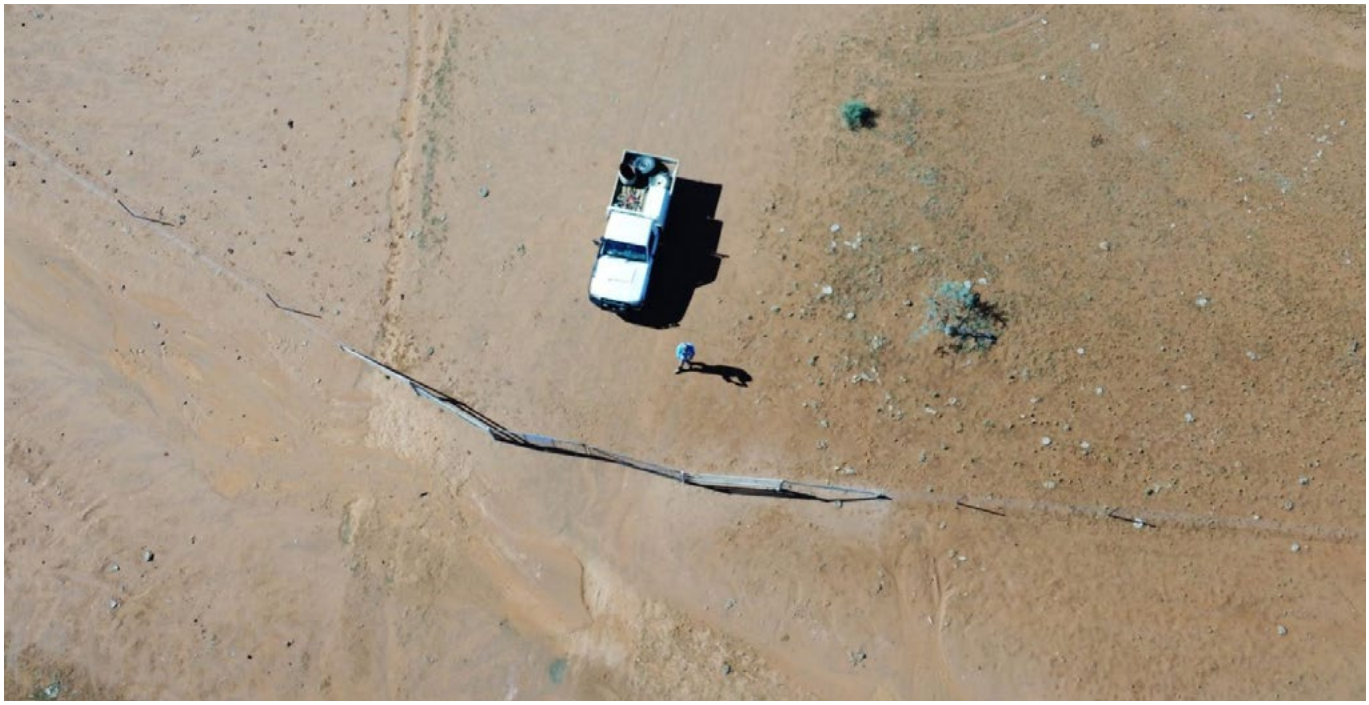

Image 5 South west paddock fence

Trap yards

Eight trap yards have been installed at water points within a 50,000 ha project area in an underutilised area in the south west of the station to manage the stocking rates and control grazing pressure. The trap yards are part of Jimba Jimba's strategy to implement a rotational grazing system, allowing rest and recovery of the perennial pastures. The installation of the trap yards will enable the timely removal of cattle when the monitoring of indicator species[9] suggests that herd reduction is necessary to preserve groundcover.

Controlling access to the water points in the trap yards will also be used to help move cattle onto new grazing areas. The cattle naturally move to areas where water points are activated, a form of self-herding. By allowing rest and recovery, these strategies will help create and maintain drought feed reserves throughout the project area.

There are now a total of 9 trap yards on Jimba Jimba, each of which include spear gates, a trough, a minimum of 2 working areas, a lead up raceway, 2 draft gates and space for a portable headbale to be moved from yard to yard. A mobile loading race is used to move the cattle from location to location.

Each of the trap yards is different in design. Will adapted these designs according to topography, layout of turning circles for loading and unloading stock and the ability to aerial muster into the yards. Will says:

> 'The designs that we started with and the ones that we ended up with are quite different. When we started putting panels up and looking at how it would work, we had to do a bit of modification. Most of the trap yards are permanent, but we have left a couple floating because we want to see how the cattle respond and have some flexibility if we need to shift things.'

9 Indicator species include ribbon grass (*Chrysopogon fallax*), roebourne plains grass (*Eragrostis xerophila*), woollybutt grass (*Eragrostis eriopoda*), buffel grass (*Cenchrus ciliaris*), silky brown top (*Eulalia aurea*), bluebush (*Maireana* spp.), earlobe saltbush (*Chenopodium gaudichaudianum*), ruby saltbush (*Enchylaena tomentosa*), tall saltbush (*Rhagodia eremaea*), other saltbushes (*Atriplex* spp.), cotton bush (*Ptilotus obovatus*), Gascoyne mulla mulla (*Ptilotus polakii*), snakewood (*Acacia xiphophylla*).

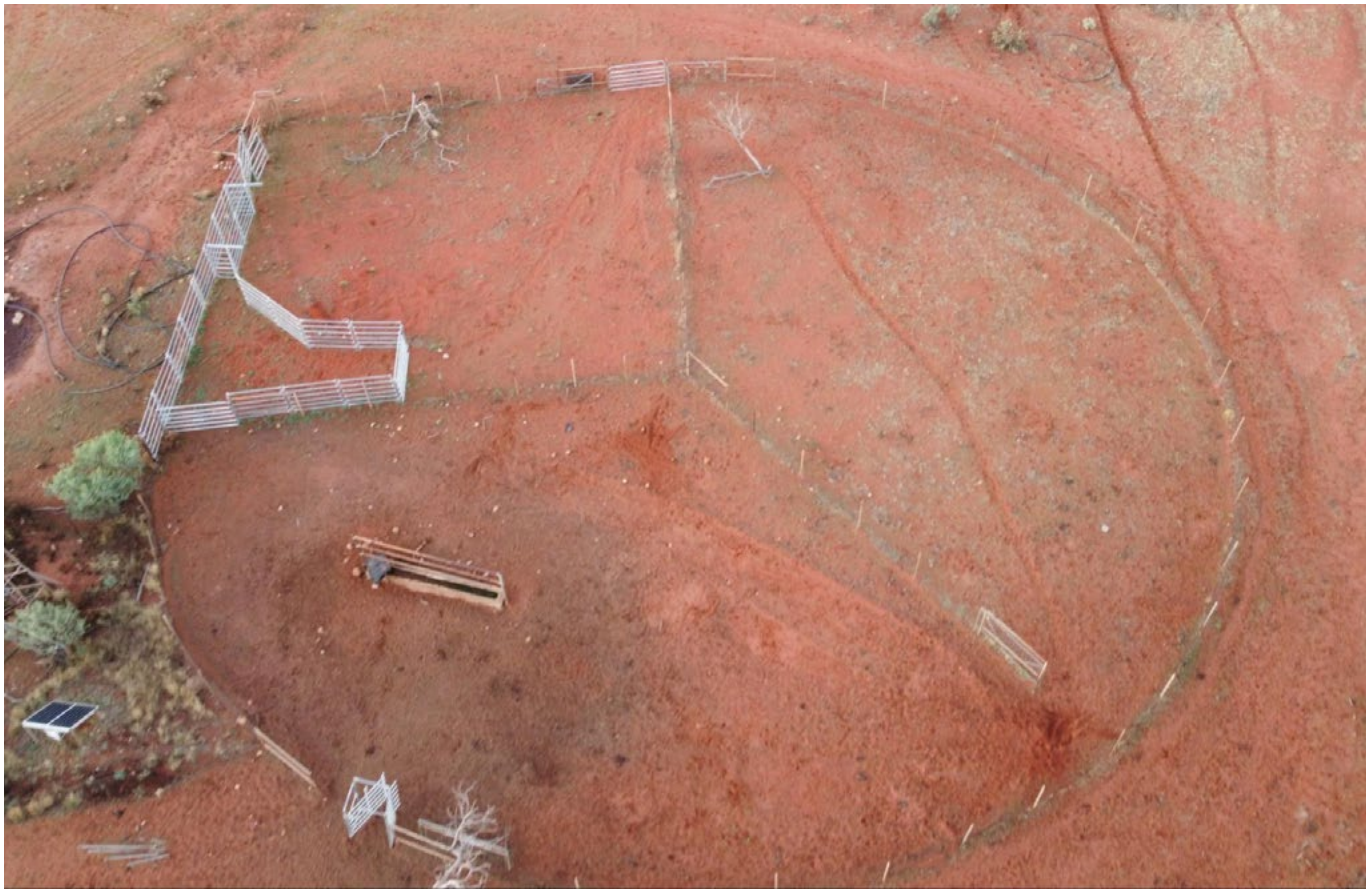

Image 6 ‘Mooka bore’ trap yards

Image 7 ‘Boomerang’ trap yards

Image 8 ‘Jocks’ trap yards

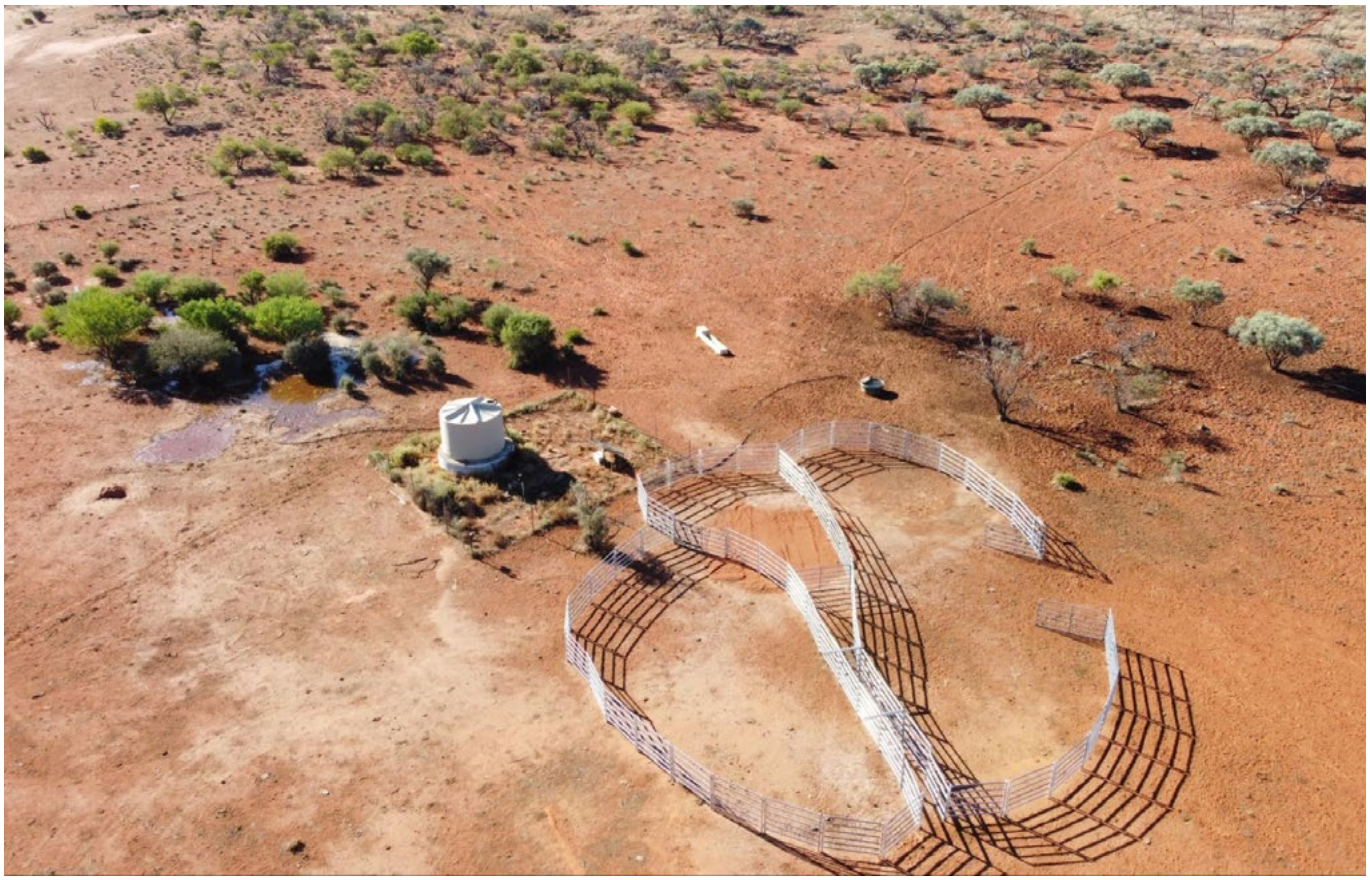

Image 9 ‘West Tank’ trap yards

Slowing the water flow

An Ecologically Sustainable Rangelands Management plan (ESRM) completed by Richard Marver in 2019 identified managing water flow along the Salt Gully creek line as a priority for the station. The creek line is in the central area of the station and is 33 km long.

The project involved earthworks on a 9 ha degraded site to repair erosion gullies and to slow and redirect the flow of water across the landscape to support plant re-establishment. The works focused on remediating former access tracks that created a pathway for water to drain quickly, turning it into an erosion gully. In order to slow the water in this area, a range of earth works were installed, including whoa boys,[10] creek restoration works, low track bunds[11] and a system of earth and scrub sieves[12] (see Images 10 and 11). A new track has been built perpendicular to the creek to avoid creating channels in the future.

These works were guided by the ESRM plan and by visits to other pastoralists in the SRRP program. Will recalls:

> 'We were inspired by the work that Ken and Jo at Melangata Station have been doing and went down for a look. We tried their approach to scrub packing on two areas so far, with a third area identified where we will also implement this approach.'

The Bastons will assess the results to see if there are any adaptations they need to make when applying these techniques in future.

10 Whoa boys are dirt banks built at right angles across eroded tracks to divert water off the track without causing erosion and so vehicles can cross over them.
11 Bunds are banks built to slow and direct water flow. Read more in the **Rangelands Rehydration Field Guide**.
12 Scrub sieves involve using scrub or dead branches along a contour to slow and filter water, trapping sediment, litter and seed. Read more in the Rangelands Rehydration Field Guide in footnote 11.

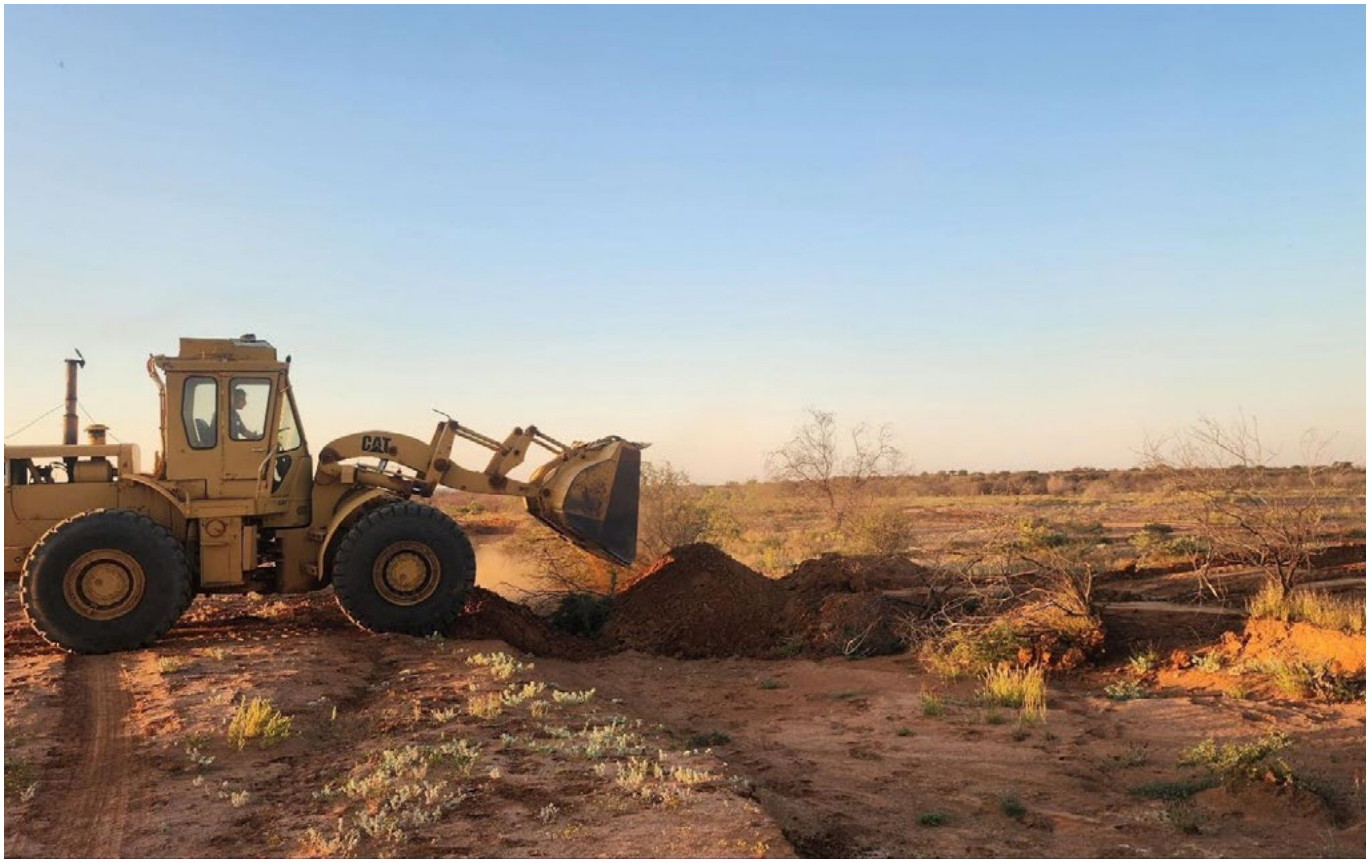

Image 10 Remediation of unused section of track with scrub sieves. James Baston using the loader to provide cover to scrub that has been packed

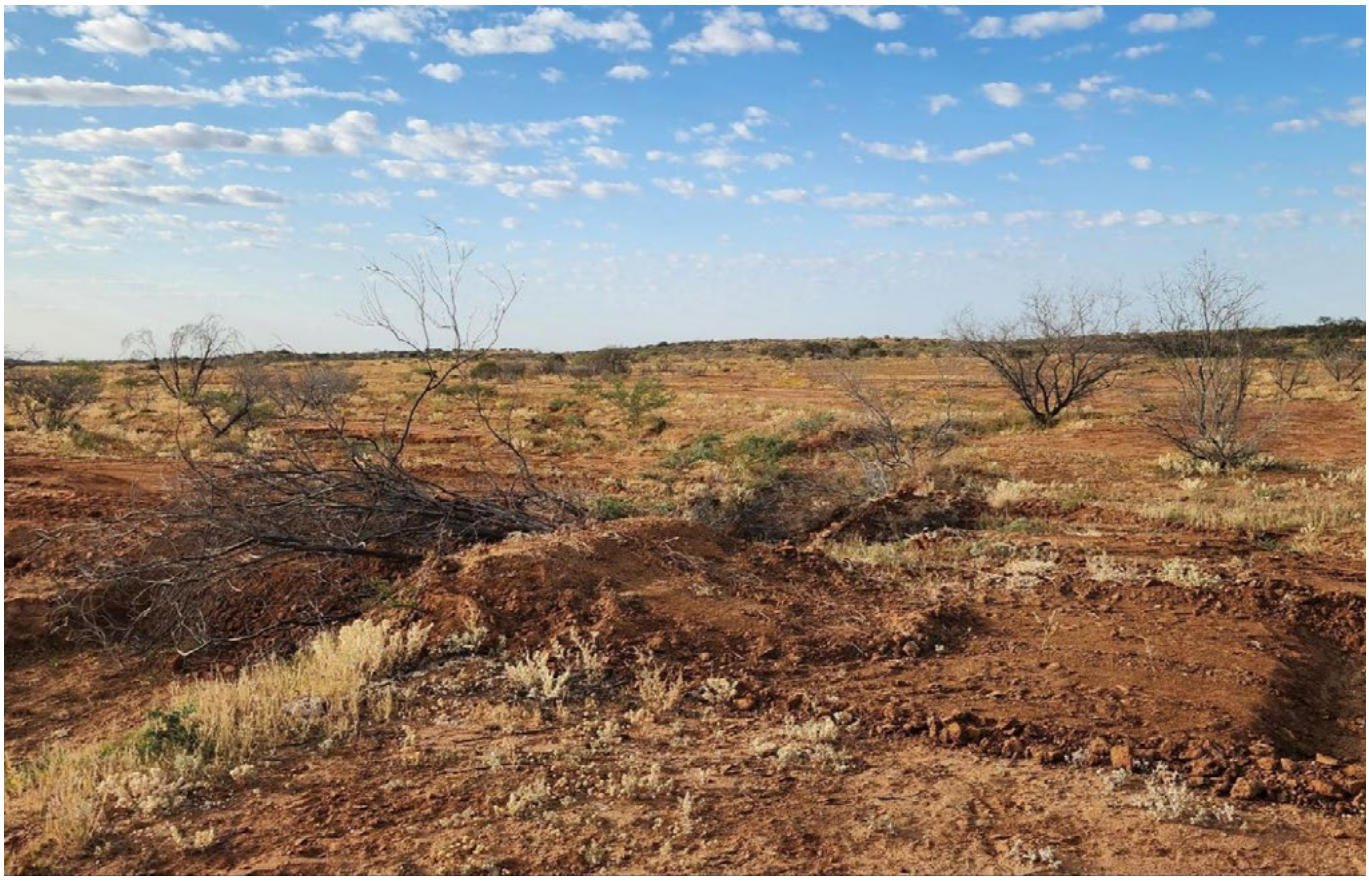

Image 11 Remediation of unused section of track with scrub sieves

Image 12 Construction of a new road access across Salt Gully (lower right) and remediation of former track (lower left)

Image 13 Installation of low track bunds on the new track

Initial insights

Since constructing the new fence, the Bastons have already seen an increase in soil condition and vegetation within the newly enclosed area. Now that the seed bank has had a chance to establish, there are forbs, annual grasses and perennial plants growing. ‘What we are achieving by rotating and moving animals from location to location through the use of trap yards, fencing and the use of feed-based cover is very important,’ says Will, ‘This is a multi-year project, it’s not going to show it’s all happened at once. We need solid rains to back up what we have done and good care and management going forward.’

When Will designed the project activities, he ‘didn’t know another way of farming holistically to the betterment of not only your animals, but to everything in your life’. By undertaking Holistic Management training and learning from other pastoralists in the program, Will can now see potential to focus on more fencing and on finding a way to lure cattle from one paddock to another that works at scale. One example is moving portable troughs along water pipelines to encourage cattle to move along the landscape instead of watering only at set locations.

A big part of the success of the project for Will has been the opportunity to upskill through training and to connect with people from other stations and be part of the journey together. ‘The stronger connection to other pastoral managers because of the project, builds more confidence in self and management when it comes to tackling on-ground issues,’ says Will.

Experiencing an 18-month drought when the project commenced was challenging. When the project work started, Will had to ‘adapt and learn fast’. The designs for trap yards he had obtained from other stations did not work on his site and Will needed to ‘improvise and adapt trap yard designs to fit the terrain and the flow of cattle on the sites’.

It is early days, however Will says they are already seeing improvements in calving rates and mustering efficiency has improved through trapping. The trap yards will reduce costs hugely compared to hiring a helicopter to muster. The trap yards will also allow them to target the removal of bulls from the heifers from March this year and to draft off and remove unproductive cattle from the property, which they weren’t doing before, so the land gets more rest. Will feels overall resilience has improved as a result of the more holistic approach focusing on ‘productive soil, productive plants and productive animals’.

> Yes, animals are to blame,
> and yes,
> animals are the solution.
>
> **Will Baston**

Next steps

If the Holistic Management inspired rotational grazing system is successful, Will is keen to replicate the work being carried out as part of this project on other parts of the station. The project feels to Will like it is getting ‘us one step towards a hundred. We’ve got a long way to go. We want to have 4 paddocks minimum to be able to rest and rotate, at the moment we have got 2 paddocks.’

The next step will be to build 40 km of fencing to go from two paddocks to three paddocks. Traditionally, more fencing has been seen as creating more maintenance, but Will sees it as a tool and realises it is important to build the fences in the right locations so they should require less management in the long term.

Will is inspired to continue implementing the learning from his Holistic Management training. This includes building some exclusion cages to monitor grazing and pasture growth. He is also keen to explore more about how herding livestock could work in their rangeland context.

Will sums up his hopes for the future as: ‘The most important thing to me is the mindset change, breaking the paradigms that pastoralists are bad people.’

Image 14 The salt gully catchment on Jimba Jimba Station

> I see a future.
> I see a lot of work, a lot of grit is needed, yet I still see a future.
>
> **Will Baston**

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