



# Is your farm carbon neutral? This one is.

## **Managing riparian vegetation for multiple benefits**

“Wyadrigah” is a 3,600ha, carbon-neutral property owned by the Barlow family, growing irrigated cotton just east of Mungindi on the NSW-QLD border.

The property, owned and managed by Anthony Barlow, has two significant riparian zones - along the Boomi River on the south-eastern end of the property and the other along the Barwon River on the north-western side.

The natural vegetation consists largely of coolibah and black box woodland, with healthy stands of river red gums in the riparian zones.

The health of these zones is important to the Barlows, who have been involved in several studies which benchmarked the condition of their riparian zones, explored their role in integrated pest management and their value in creating a carbon-neutral farm.

However, in a continuing theme among cotton growers, the preservation of these areas is seen as important to maintain the aesthetics of the places they call home.

*“These areas are part of the natural landscape that needs preserving,”* Anthony said.

*“In my experience, riparian zones on irrigated cotton farms clearly can’t be farmed and are rarely grazed these days, so aren’t negatively affected by selective or over-grazing or erosion of river banks from stock creating pads down to water.*

*“That is the case with our riparian zones. The zone along the Barwon River in particular hasn’t been stocked for about 30 years, and according to the Cotton Growers in Sustainable Landscapes project we were part of, they are in excellent health.”*

In 2013 Anthony was part of this study with five other landholders in the area which initially sought to identify the value of native vegetation for integrated pest management.

As a result of this initial investigation, the landholders identified the need for accurate baseline data about the health and diversity of their native vegetation and its role managing production and maintaining biodiversity on their farms. This led to the assessment and benchmarking of the condition of a combined 16,830 hectares of native vegetation across the five farms

*“We have a history of practicing IPM in our operations here, and see beneficials as an important part of that regime,”* Anthony said.

*“Assessment of our riparian areas received a good report card and the habitat complexity was impressive.*

*“It was a learning experience for sure and really interesting to take a close look at these areas with the ecologist Dave Carr and learn more about things like the age of some of trees and the variety of species there.*

*“What interested me was the age of some of the understory trees in relation to their size, I was really surprised to hear that some of the*

coolibah were over 100 years old, a lot older than what I thought going purely off their size.

*“It was great to get a deeper understanding and knowledge of the native vegetation on our farm.”*

The Barlow’s report card from the assessment was a good one the Barwon zone (ungrazed for 30 years) and the other (sporadically grazed) seen as excellent examples of healthy riparian zones.

Going forward, Anthony says if the industry wants to continue to promote sustainability it has to be quantifiable.

*“It is one thing to say we are managing our land well, but to have this quantified through a close up study is a powerful tool for the industry,”* he said.

*“It is a similar story with carbon emissions and our carbon footprint.”*

## **The value of carbon in the sustainability equation**

“Wyadrigah” is a carbon-neutral cotton farm. Anthony has been very interested in the relationship of native vegetation and his whole farm carbon emissions, and as such worked with CottonInfo Carbon and Climate Technical Specialist Jon Welsh to study carbon emissions and sequestration to ascertain the potential for his farm to be carbon-

neutral based on the existence of his well-managed riparian vegetation. Anthony recently received the good news of the outcome of the study.

*“Naturally I’m really pleased with this result, even a little surprised,”* Anthony said. *“This is a great result.”*

*“Knowing our carbon footprint is important to us: there is going to be more market pull-through around this issue and it is a good thing to start monitoring now so we can make sure we are on the front foot in terms of quantifying our carbon emissions.”*

*“I see traceability in terms of sustainability and carbon footprint, becoming more important to consumers into the future, and the research is also telling us that.”*

*“Cotton consumption is increasing but our market share is decreasing so going forward our industry is going to need every edge to be competitive. Your goal is to be carbon neutral, so if we benchmark this we can learn from those performing better.”*

### **For more information:**

- Anthony Barlow: 02 6753 2388, [anbarlow@bigpond.com](mailto:anbarlow@bigpond.com)
- Jon Welsh, CottonInfo: [jon.welsh@cottoninfo.net.au](mailto:jon.welsh@cottoninfo.net.au)
- CottonInfo website: [www.cottoninfo.net.au](http://www.cottoninfo.net.au)

