



WOODSIDE FARM
CUDLEE CREEK FIRE

20 DECEMBER 2019

RONALD BAKER

19 December 2019

- 4th Total Fire Ban in a row
- Catastrophic Bushfire Danger Rating
- 40 deg C at 9am North wind
- Large pine tree brought down
a power line onto a fence
- Automated power switch off failed
- Fire started 5km away
- Spot fire started in the olives 1hour later
- 25,000Ha burnt, 96 homes, farms, one death
- House, workshop, equipment are ok
- \$150 million estimated damage



Assessment

2552 olive trees burnt (of total 6414)

Cattle, pasture, hay, sheds, fencing, old growth eucalyptus lost



What to do first?

- Look after surviving cattle
(63 of 73 lost some in the fire and some put down in the next 2 weeks)
- No prescription for the olives
- Water a priority
- All irrigation tubing rapidly bought, no more available
- Fire was 2 working days before Christmas, Netafin closing down



Irrigation

- Collection of 2x25 km of burnt irrigation tubing (Olives SA working party)
- New irrigation tubing arrives 3 weeks after the fire installed and operating at 4 weeks



Control The Reshooting

- All burnt trees cut to 1500 mm (5 ft)
- Tops pulled into rows (friends and others)
- Mulching (Gallards)



Cleanup Continues Over Whole Farm

- Pasture
- Fencing
- Hayshed
- Fallen Timber +++
- 3-4 Men on and off for 3 months



2020

- 500 Olive trees replanted
- 1400 regrowing from the primary branches
- 930 regrowing from the base

Large labour input selectively removing shoots, initially each 3 months or so

- To form secondary branches
- Or to grow a tree (later Basta and Nail 600EC driveby)

Primary Branches Shooting



Basal Shooting



Problems - Trunk Damage



Trunk Damage



2023 Harvest

Concern re viability of restored trees

Problem - Trees regrown from branches

1. Generally, have grown well and many have fruited well
2. But all have trunk damage, many greater than 60% of circumference
3. Arborist's opinion: beyond 30% the tree is a write off for long term structural integrity and productivity

2023 Harvest

Problem - Trees grown from the base

1. Growing well but we had to stop harvesting (Sicma F3) as they were snapping off at the base
2. Arborist's opinion: this is to be expected as these trees have grown from an epicormic growth centre

And these trees are also a technical write off but we will try to harvest again next year

Total trees with Significant Damage 1885

Branch Failure



Epicormic Growth Failure



Epicormic Growth Failure



Financial Assistance

Public Donation

Collected by SAGovt on behalf of those burnt but only half went to farmers some of whom are yet to recover

- Some went to Parndana on KI the only town that was burnt and as far as I can see the remainder went to the local Council bureaucrats for their wellness and community resilience programs

PIRSA

- Grant 1 cleanup prompt payment
- Grant 2 cleanup
- All spent on cleanup

WFI

- No problem paid promptly
- Irrigation covered, not trees

OLIVE GROWER Rebuild and Recovery Grant

- Federal money administered by PIRSA
- Onerous and difficult, taking nearly 3 yrs to finalize
- Payment rate half that of apple and pear growers
- Paid one third of my claim

Class Action

Class action initiated by Maddens Lawyers , Warrnambool, Vic To seek payment for uninsured losses.

- I engaged a Forensic Arborist, recently
- Report should be beyond successful challenge
- Advised re economic write-off for trees

Regenerated with trunk damage > 30 %

or arising from epicormic growth

Lessons

***Much time and cost would be saved by removing trees which I now know are not viable in the long term.

- Have effective fire fighting equipment
- Make your house and fixed assets fire safe as much as possible
- Many houses were saved by green grass and were occupied
- Keep dry grass amongst the olives short
- Sprinkler irrigation if present could be used to advantage in front of fire

KEEP SAFE | FIRE RESPECTS NO ONE

