



Opinion Editorial
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Aboriginal techniques used to protect precious grasslands

The same essential techniques used by Tasmanian Aborigines for thousands of years are being repeated today by Forico to ensure the high conservation grasslands across its estate are protected for future generations.

At the core of this ancient practice is the occasional ecological burning of highland grasslands to protect them against weeds and the encroachment of scrub and forest.

Of course, the process today is more sophisticated than when Tasmania's First People burnt the grasslands in their hunt for food. Scientists, meteorologists, trained fire fighters and drones now make up the specialist resource teams that undertake, manage and extinguish these low intensity burns, which are essential to maintaining the health and vitality of these globally significant and protected landscapes.

As the name suggests, ecological burning needs to be differentiated from other types of burning to remove, for example, forest residues or to clear land. Rather, it is intended to enhance the health and vitality of the grasslands to maintain and enhance their biodiversity.

Each year Forico allocates a significant budget to fund the management of its grasslands which, apart from low intensity burning, covers the cost of removing weeds and scrub that may start infiltrating the areas. Ecological consultants are also engaged by Forico to monitor not only the grasslands themselves, but the plant and animal species that live there. If burning is not undertaken, the grasslands revert over time to scrubby ecosystems and their biodiversity values diminish.

Of the 76,830 hectares of natural vegetation that Forico manages for conservation and biodiversity values, there are approximately 4,700 hectares of grassland of which 1,879 are covered by conservation covenants in perpetuity.

Not every grassland is burnt every year. Forico has a specific Management Plan that determines the fire frequency and size of the exercise to ensure competing values are appropriately managed, ensuring both plants and animals flourish and benefit from the interventions.

Each grassland scheduled to be burnt in any given year is assessed in early spring to determine whether burning is required and what weather conditions are needed to ensure optimal success. When burning is undertaken in spring, control measures are put in place to ensure the fire is contained and extinguished well before the hot summer months arrive. Qualified Forico staff and contractors with firefighting capabilities attend each burn to ensure the safety of the exercise.

Historically, the grasslands had to be walked to determine the areas treated, which was not particularly accurate. However, drones are now used during and after the burn to determine the success and accuracy of the process.



Ecologists, researchers and other interested stakeholders, including Threatened Plants Tasmania, conduct condition assessments and monitoring of the grasslands on a periodic basis to confirm the effectiveness of Forico's management approach.

It is not just about maintaining the health of the grasslands that is important to Forico. Many threatened flora and fauna species benefit from the grasslands being properly managed. The Crowded Leek orchid and the Ptunarra brown butterfly – two species which are protected under state and federal legislation – are among the many plants and animals to benefit from the management process.

Forico is currently undertaking a trial program to resurrect a failing grassland by using a mulching process which, so far, has delivered some remarkable results in just two years.

The company is also engaging with the Aboriginal community in Tasmania to look at opportunities for them to assist in the company's ecological burning activities in the years ahead.

Visit the Forico website www.forico.com.au to access more information relating to the company's sustainability credentials.

Simon Cook is Forico's Sustainability Manager and recent recipient of the Richard Stanton Memorial Award for Excellence in Forest Management.