



Part of the TurfNSW: TURF INDUSTRY FLOOD MANAGEMENT PLAN. TURF NSW 2024

GROWER  
INTERVIEWS

# TIPPING POINT

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## INTRODUCTION

The Turf Production Industry was significantly impacted by the devastating floods in NSW during 2020-2022, with some farms experiencing up to 8 floods. This was a situation not seen for nearly 30 years, so many of our turf businesses had no or very little experience with major floods.

Following the first significant flood in 2021, a meeting was called to gather Hawkesbury growers to discuss the impact of the floods and the likely impact on their crops and businesses. This meeting was attended by over 90 locals and provided valuable data from around 30 farms in the Hawkesbury. This data was used to calculate an estimated 868 hectares of impacted turf crops across all of NSW, with an estimated value of \$86 million of impacted turf. This value was considered conservative, and it only included crops. At the time of data collection, many paddocks were still under water and remained that way for several weeks. The estimations didn't consider any damage or loss of equipment, infrastructure or the costs of reconstruction.

During 2021, with the support of Turf Australia, the NSW growers were well represented at many government flood impact and recovery meetings, both state and federal meetings, including a meeting with the current Prime Minister and several in person meetings with various Federal and State Ministers. We were able to present the data, the impact on the industry and the implications of the loss of available turf to NSW.

This resulted in Turf NSW being awarded two projects to support recovery and resilience of the turf production industry from natural disasters, commencing in 2023. A focus of the projects was to learn from experiences and develop outcomes to assist turf producers now and in the future.



## GROWER INTERVIEWS

In early 2023, 19 turf production businesses, across NSW, were interviewed to understand the full impact of the floods and assist in directing other project outcomes for the benefit of all growers.

These businesses included some new to the industry right through to fourth generation family businesses. On average there were 27 years' experience across the interviewed growers.

Property sizes varied significantly. In total, the businesses represented over 623 hectares or 1540 acres of turf production.

The businesses were asked a series of questions relating to their flood experiences.

## WHAT RESOURCES DO YOU USE DURING FLOODS?

Majority of the growers utilise the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) to monitor predicted rainfall, and river levels in their local areas as well as areas that will impact their river system. Many growers in the Hawkesbury monitor rainfall in Robertson in the NSW Southern Highlands and Goulbourn, as it effects their catchment area. "We don't need local rain to have a flood".

Many Hawkesbury growers talked about the impact of the Warragamba Dam opening and creating a very heavy and destructive flood waters. Regardless of the location, all growers monitor river and creek levels to determine the likely timing of floods on their properties.

In addition to the tools and resources available online, growers utilised local knowledge as a main source of gathering information. Talking to those who have experienced floods in the past, talking to other growers at different locations on the river and looking at local information.

## DO YOU HAVE A FLOOD MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR YOUR BUSINESS?

Only 1 grower had developed a flood plan after the first flood they experienced in 2021. All others indicated that they had learnt along the way and due to the number of floods, had become experts in packing up ready for floods, but plans were in their head and not documented.

## WHERE DO YOU START WHEN PREPARING FOR A FLOOD?

All growers start with removing their pumps from water ways.

Sorting of sheds and equipment were usually next on the list. Packing up tools, supplies and offices to pallet racking or higher levels where available. Others packed onto trucks and relocated to higher ground.

Farm Machinery is packed up and also moved to higher ground. The time involved in this process varied significantly along with how many people were involved in the process. After several floods, growers had the system sorted and staff aware of what was required. Many had the support of family and friends to assist.

Some farms had up to 15 people working around the clock to pack up and relocate equipment and machinery.

Hawkesbury growers commented on the challenges of the movement of trucks and machinery taking several hours more than usual due to the high number of locals on the road in the flood preparation period, and therefore if they weren't prepared early enough there was higher risk they weren't able to get all equipment off the farms.

### Some key findings included:

- Have staff and helpers in teams and delegate roles.
- Move everything off the farm that is mobile.
- Prepare ahead of time for a suitable location for equipment to higher ground.
- Prepare your shed and office to be easily packed up and mobile.
- Tie down or strap everything that can't be moved.

## HOW LONG WERE THE PADDOCKS UNDER WATER?

48% of growers interviewed experienced paddocks under water for more than 10 days. 26% were impacted by flood waters for 5-10 days and the remaining 26% were up to 5 days under flood waters. The time turf is spent under water will have a significant impact on turf recovery and silt deposits.

## WHERE DID YOU SEE THE MOST DAMAGE FROM THE FLOODS?

All growers indicated that the biggest impact to the business was the turf crops and paddocks. Many had lost crops that were ready to harvest, had large amounts of silt left on the paddocks and had to relevel and rebuild the paddocks.

Riverbank damage was another common factor. Some losing big areas of land, washed away by the floods.

In addition, most businesses had some level of damage to infrastructure such as sheds and offices etc.

*Try to minimise the things you have to move.*

**Alexandria Muscat,**  
Green Life Turf



## WHERE DO YOU START WITH THE CLEAN UP?

1. Start with access to the farm first, cleaning up roadways.
2. Repair pump sites to reinstate the pumps.
3. Wash out and repair sheds.
4. Return equipment and machinery when dry enough and safe to do so.
5. Don't rush back onto the paddocks. More damage can be done trying to get back onto wet paddocks.

## WHEN ARE YOU LIKELY TO BE BACK IN FULL OPERATION?

At the time of interviews, no business was back to full operation. Most believed it would be a year or two before they were fully operational and that would depend heavily on the weather.

Many growers talked about having to buy in turf from Queensland to maintain orders and keep their clients, which was expensive in transportation.

Some growers reported having to reduce staff to stay in operation.

## HAVE YOU ACCESSED THE PRIMARY PRODUCER GRANTS?

The majority of the growers had accessed the grants available and while very grateful for the opportunity, many commented on how challenging it was to go through the process and the delays in receiving funds. Many had worked with local RAA staff who assisted them during this process.



## LESSONS LEARNT

Despite the immense physical, mental and financial challenges the growers faced, many were optimistic on good times to come.

Some comments received included:

- ✓ Don't fight with nature.
- ✓ Save for a rainy day.
- ✓ Every flood is different.
- ✓ Don't rush back in to fix things.
- ✓ Think outside the box to resolve your issues.
- ✓ Share information with others and learn from others.
- ✓ Don't underestimate the mental health impacts and get a good counsellor and talk to mates.
- ✓ Consider higher ground for your crops.
- ✓ The sun will shine again, and good days will come.

# TIPPING POINT

## VIDEO PRODUCTION

Nine businesses were involved in the development of videos to capture their experiences and allow others to understand and learn from them in the future. The locations of the videos included South West Sydney, Hawkesbury, Hunter, Taree and Northern Rivers region.

We also interviewed a meteorologist through WeatherZone to gain a better understanding of the extreme weather system during this period.

**The common factor across all farms was that every flood was different, and every paddock was different, which means there is no one size fits all for managing floods.**

**This project has resulted in a half hour documentary and 9 short topic videos >**

Turf NSW would like to acknowledge and thank the turf businesses involved in the video productions. Reflecting on the challenges they experienced was often a difficult process, but they were very generous with their time and knowledge and knew the benefit of sharing this information for future generations.

The information provided here is not necessarily a definitive solution to your situation. Rather, it draws upon a collection of lived experiences and options for consideration. Each grower's circumstances are unique, so it's important to evaluate individually and apply these tools on a case-by-case basis.



## SPECIFIC VIDEOS:

Documentary:

- **Tipping Point – Impact of the floods on NSW Turf Growers**

Topic Videos:

- Know Your Area
- Assessing Flood Risks
- Flood Preparation
- Flood Preparation – Mobilise
- Post Flood Safety
- Post Flood – Getting Back
- Post Flood – Clean Up
- Evaluation, Salvage or Restart
- Post Flood – Time Taken

## HOW TO VIEW FLOOD RECOVERY VIDEOS:

...or go to: [Flood Recovery Videos - Turf NSW](#) > [LINK](#)



## THANK YOU:

- Green Life Turf
- Greener Lawns
- Agturf
- Southern Cross Turf
- Earls Turf
- Coastal Turf
- Dad & Dave's Turf
- Cobbitty Lawn Turf
- Abulk Turf

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Every FLOOD is different

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Turf NSW would like to acknowledge and thank the turf producers how gave their time, expertise and shared their experiences during the floods to develop this document and the other projects with this funding program.