

ResearchReport

Kondinin Group

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DRONES IN AGRICULTURE

TOOLS OR TOYS?

Use your drone responsibly

Livestock producer Ben Watts is an agricultural specialist user of drones or remotely piloted aircraft and cautions they need to be used responsibly.

“We use a variety of drones on our property but we make sure we always

use them responsibly and stick to the guidelines,” Watts said.

Watts, who runs a grazing property at Molong in New South Wales, has been using drones for about three years and being aware of industry change, particularly regulations, is important, he says.

“It’s a rapidly changing technology but that’s no excuse for not keeping up to date.”

Kondinin Group caught up with Watts earlier this year at a drone demonstration day held at Berrigan in NSW.

Watts had a range of drones at the demonstration, including copter style smaller units and an impressive X-wing design drone, which is capable of vertical

Whatever the drone, Watts said primary producers should consider their use before purchase.

“We mostly use our drones for monitoring stock and infrastructure but we also regularly map the property for imagery so we can make decisions on pasture growth and budgeting.”

During spring, the Watts may run up to generate Normalised Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI) images, for example.

“Then we know pretty accurately our plant and pasture status and we can even develop three-dimensional maps to help with drainage and the like.”

But one of the simplest and most effective uses of the drone for Watts is for replacing the downtime of vehicle travel for jobs such as checking fences and water.

“We have the drones set up pretty much to work autonomously so we have a pre-SURJUDPPHGÅJKWSDWK:HFDQØWFK the drone footage live or review it at a later date.”

Watts has also recently started to use the drone for mustering sheep in steep country.

“Just the faint noise of the drone will get the sheep to start to walk together, which is a great help in hard to access country.”

Another important consideration for drone use is managing and paying for data. Some of the higher end software and imagery requirements can require a 20 gigabyte a month plan from an internet provider.

“And some companies who sell imagery products based on subscription will sell of data free’ type of offer and after that the data costs can be staggering. A single NDVI image for a paddock could be as big as one gigabyte.

“So it pays to do your homework.” **FA**



Drone of all trades: Ben Watts uses drones for many tasks on his property at Molong in NSW including monitoring stock and infrastructure.

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