From idea to reality – delivering environmental and climate improvement in the Eyre Peninsula

By Marnie Hope, Group Sustainability Manager, Flinders Port Holdings

As part of developing Flinders Port Holdings' (FPH) 5-year Sustainability Plan, we have reaffirmed our commitment to achieving a net zero roadmap. This isn't revelatory, but an important marker for the business to step back and look at the realities involved in achieving it.

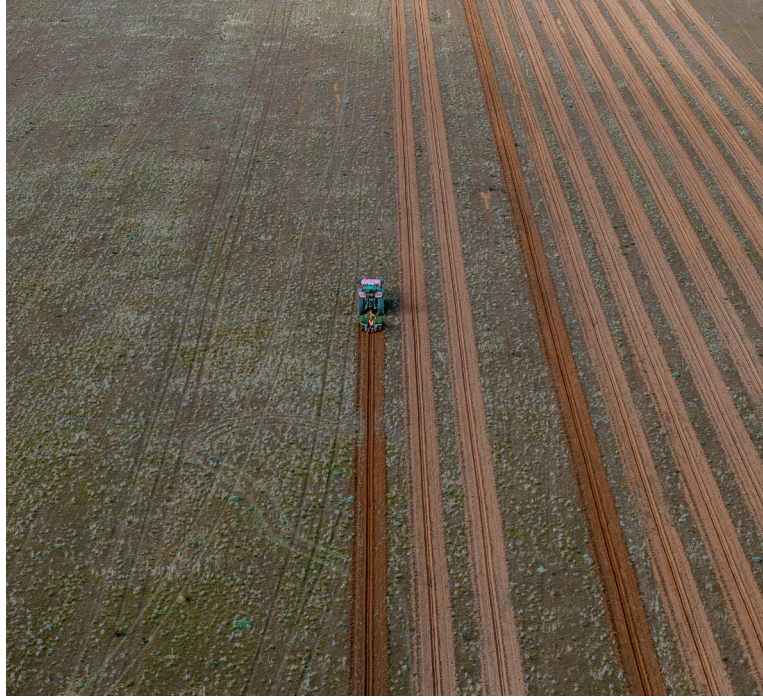
The fact is that ports and logistics operators remain part of one of the hardest-to-abate sectors in the economy. While we have made strides, particularly in our scope 1 and scope 2 emissions reduction, we still don't have all the levers available to achieve net zero purely through decarbonisation.

To achieve our 2050 ambitions, we need a pragmatic approach to residual emissions that remain difficult to abate in the near term.

For FPH and our industry peers, residual emissions typically fall into two categories: those within our own infrastructure, where technology for lower emissions fuels is still maturing, and those outside our direct control across the value chain, particularly from vessels whose movements we enable.

These decarbonisation gaps will be closed in time, but we understood we needed to find ways to manage residual emissions now. It was at this stage that the potential of carbon farming was raised.

At the outset, we could see the potential for such an initiative to be a win-win, creating a credible pathway to manage residual emissions, while also delivering environmental and regional benefits to South Australia. But while the strategic logic stacked up – we knew there were significant practical barriers in place.



Our initial priority was to rehabilitate land in our home state, where all our operations are based. That decision triggered a detailed mapping exercise to identify regions that met our technical and commercial criteria.

Through this process, the Eyre Peninsula emerged as the right fit. Firstly, the land was cost-effective, so the commercials began to look promising.

But the region's profile was also attractive. It is a low-rainfall area, so the project would need to be designed for resilience as well as performance – a priority for us to ensure the delivery of real added environmental value.

We also wanted to avoid reforesting productive agricultural land, which made land capability, location and broader land use impacts central to the assessment. Across all these criteria, the Eyre Peninsula emerged as the most viable option.

With location and commercial considerations settled, the final challenge was ensuring our approach was robust, transparent, and defensible. We selected reforestation through an environmental or mallee plantings methodology because it best matched the site conditions and the outcomes we were seeking.

Crucially, this approach was credible and manageable, giving us control of the outcomes, improving them over time, and withstanding scrutiny. That rigour mattered to us, given the variability in quality and the relative immaturity of carbon credits and the markets that support them.

With our three core challenges passed, we were able to progress to project deployment. In July this year, in collaboration with Trees for Eyre and RSW Environment, we completed the first phase of planting.

This was also the culmination of months of collaboration with regional contractors for seed collection, nursery work, and site preparation even before a single plant was planted.

Our ability to use local contractors was critical due to their expert local knowledge and an opportunity for us to bring economic value to the local community.

While we have acquired approximately 700 hectares of land, our focus for the first year has been on an initial 110-hectare block. In year one, this includes planting about 60,000 Eucalypt species local to the area.

The longer-term plan is to progressively expand the project, with later phases expected to include a more biodiverse mix of seed and seedlings, along with broader land management measures.

It is at an early stage, but our initial projections for the full 25-year project point to an abatement of approximately 15,500 tonnes of CO_2-e, with future phases potentially increasing that total over time.

With planting complete, our focus now turns to land care, monitoring, and hopefully phased expansion. Our staged approach also reflects the broader reality that the carbon and nature markets are still evolving. Through the next year, we will monitor the success of the first phase.

We are also realistic; in a low-rainfall environment like the Eyre Peninsula, outcomes can vary materially from one season to the next. Ongoing land care will also be a continual job. Everything from stocking density control, fire management, feral and animal plant control to replanting needs to be addressed over the life of the project. But initial signs are hugely promising.

Whatever the results and the ultimate carbon abatement yield of the project, it will not distract us from driving down our own direct emissions and reporting progress against this.

It is commercially sound, environmentally credible, and aligned with the group's core objective of delivering sustainable growth.

Just as importantly, it reflects the reality that decarbonisation, land stewardship and regional development are increasingly interconnected.

This reality is front of mind for our business and our customers, with ports and infrastructure across the state, but it's just as relevant for a vast range of businesses across Australia.