



Nursery & Garden Industry
Australia

Case Study

For immediate release

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Building industry's resilience to extreme weather events

In close to 30 years of operation, Lizard Mountain Nursery near Yeppoon had not really felt the wrath of nature until 2015 when Category Five Tropical Cyclone Marcia crossed the coast of Central Queensland.

By the time she made landfall to the north at Shoalwater Bay, and then hit Lizard Mountain as a Category Four system, Marcia not only upended Ian and Elaine Stewart's nursery, but also their entire approach to the management of their business, which produces palms, cycads and foliage plants for the chain store market in Queensland, NSW and Western Australia.

The storm, whilst a trauma that remains with the family, became the catalyst for an unprecedented focus on business resilience and a realisation preparedness is key to mitigating the impacts of severe events.

"It was our first cyclone and we really didn't know what to prepare for or what to expect," Ian said.



Image 1: Lizard Mountain Nursery in 2017.

"We buckled down and tidied things up the best we could and we thought we were ready for it – but we really weren't."

After sheltering in the family home during the storm, when the Stewart's were able to make their way out to survey the damage, the impact was immediately evident.

"The biggest impact for us was we lost our shade structure and the implication of that was sunburn which affected us more than the cyclone per se," Ian said.

"Anybody involved in the nursery industry knows if a plant is on its side for 24 hours being sunburnt it's history, so we had a real rush to try and get salvageable plants out and a very limited window of time to do it.



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Image 2 and 3: Nursery before and after cyclone.



“I remember my sister ringing and I said that we were done and dusted – our nursery as we knew it was gone.”

But a determination to not only rebuild, but to do so in a way that would heighten resilience and seek to protect the nursery from future severe events, turned the Stewarts’ focus to preparedness. Analysing the damage, and understanding what could be done to abate impact in the future, motivated a new approach.



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“The most important thing you need is a plan for how you are going to deal with a disaster, whether it be a cyclone, a flood, a fire or some type of other event, and that is something we didn’t have and probably most places don’t,” Ian said.

“You need to be prepared for no power, no phone and no contact with anyone else – you’re on your own.”

One of the most surprising learnings for the Stewarts was the discovery an external contact is often best placed to head up implementation of the recovery strategy in those important first few days post event.



Image 4 and 5: Damage from the cyclone.

“From now on we will have an outside contact who we have a plan of action with to get things going and to contact the people on our behalf, including our customers, to let them know what is going on and to help organise the recovery. You won’t have power or phone and, to be honest, you won’t want to talk about the impact of what has happened.

“You also have to have materials on hand like rope, wire, shade cloth, poly pipe and a few fittings so things are there to act very quickly given the first two to three days are the most important in terms of being able to salvage plants.

“It is critical the staff are involved and aware of the plan because they need to know what their roles are and what their responsibility is to the business because you simply cannot do it all yourself.”

Despite the initial pain and never before chartered recovery process, the Stewarts are now reaping the benefits of having rebuilt a thriving and robust nursery that has been strengthened rather than scarred by the Marcia experience.

“One of the greatest things it forced us to do was ask all sorts of questions and to reevaluate every part of what we do,” Ian said.



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“We are a much better, more efficient and more resilient business than ever before and because of that we are much more profitable.”

“As I have said to people many times now, I’ve been in this nursery for 30 odd years and there’s never been a better time to be in this industry.”



Image 6 and 7: Rebuild after the cyclone.

Nursery & Garden Industry Queensland (NGIQ) is currently managing an industry recovery and resilience project (IRRO) in conjunction with the Queensland Government to look at the activities needed immediately prior to an event and in the 0–48 hours following a natural disaster. This work will re-package and extend information already available on the Emergency & Disaster Planning section of the NGIQ website <https://www.ngiq.asn.au/resources/technical-information/>

For more information about emergency and disaster planning including checklists, factsheets and emergency plans, visit the nursery industry’s knowledge portal <http://nurseryproductionfms.com.au/emergency-disaster-planning/>

To view the Lizard Mountain video, visit:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=as450A7QkG8>

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