

SOUTHERN GULF links

JULY/AUGUST
2004



Southern Gulf
Catchments

NRM PLANNING REACHES NEXT STAGE.

By Jacqui McClure

The Natural Resource Management Plan being developed for the North West QLD region has now been summarised, and data collated. Since February the Southern Gulf Catchments staff along with the Earthtech consultancy team, have been gathering information and views from the community to determine NRM issues important to the people of the region.

Those views have now been used to form Draft 1 of the Regional NRM Plan. During June and July, the Plan was written into a five booklet set. The Draft was then consulted upon by the SGC Board of Directors. It was also reviewed by advisory groups, representing the community, industry and technical sectors. Members filling the advisory groups were selected by the SGC Board of Directors and staff based on their interests and competencies, to ensure a broad range of attitudes and ideas were incorporated.

The official Draft 1 is due to be sent to the Joint Steering Committee (JSC) and North Region Coordination Group for comment at the beginning of August, in accordance with guidelines set by the Federal Government. The JSC will review the targets identified by the community to ensure that they are realistic, achievable and in line with the current objectives of Government and the various agencies. It will be those targets that the government will ultimately invest in through the Natural Heritage Trust 2 (NHT2) funding arrangement.

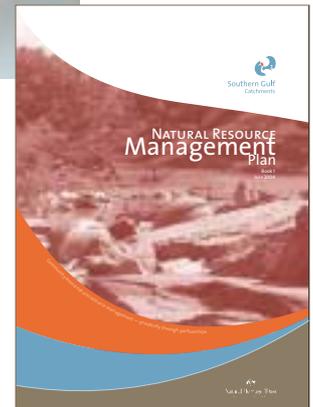


Ongoing planning meetings. Barry Lincoln, Interpart Consultant, Richard Makim, Pastoral Sector Director, Ashley Gallagher, Vice-Chairman, Emma Blacklock, Executive Officer, Lisa Rand, Administration Officer (Photo by Jacqui McClure)

Importantly the Draft will be taken back to the community for comment prior to official accreditation by Government Ministers of the Regional NRM Plan. This community consultation is expected to commence later in the year, when the SGC staff will be back out on the road asking for community views of the NRM Plan Draft. During this time the Draft Plan will be available in CD format from the Southern Gulf Catchments office or online at the SGC website. Public meetings will be held across the region in order to consult the community on their views of the Draft.

Final accreditation of the Plan is expected in early 2005.

For updates on the NRM Planning process check out our website:
www.southerngulfcatchments.com



The Draft plan takes shape.



Natural Heritage Trust
Helping Communities Help Australia

PEST OF THE MONTH: FERAL PIG

By Jacqui McClure

Feral pigs are a declared pest under Queensland legislation. Early settlers introduced domestic pigs to Australia but subsequent release, either accidental or deliberate, have resulted in a massive wild pig population. Feral pigs inhabit 40 per cent of Australia, and throughout most of the Southern Gulf Catchments region, they are declared at a 'high density'. As a declared pest, landholders are required to control any populations on their land, and local governments have to authority to serve notice to do so.



Photos and information provided by DNRM & E.

Feral pigs have an enormous impact on both the environment and our economy. Around creeks and lakes, feral pigs have been known to create 'ploughs' up to 20 metres from the water edge. This activity causes a dramatic decrease to water quality, as well as reduces the habitat for small animals reliant on the area. The ploughing increases the chance of erosion, and allows weeds to spread easier. The diet of feral pigs also effect our native species, as studies have shown they feed on not only native flora, but also small marsupials, reptiles, insects and ground-nesting birds.

The economic impact of feral pigs is also significant, particularly in the agricultural industry, where in Australia, it is estimated they cause up to \$80 million of damage each year. Crop seeds and seedlings can be uprooted and trampled, and pigs are known to feed on grains, fruits and vegetables. Pastures are also damaged by pigs through grazing and rooting, as well as the carrying and spreading of weeds. The threat feral pigs have to livestock is mainly concentrated on the lambing industry, where research has shown that feral pigs have taken up to 40 per cent of lambs. Finally, feral pigs also damage fence lines and water quality in dams, tanks, and water troughs.

Feral pigs are also carriers of disease which can infect not only domestic pigs, but also other livestock, and even humans. They are known to carry diseases such as Tuberculosis, Bovine Brucellosis, and Q Fever, which causes symptoms similar to Ross River virus. Pigs also carry Leptospirosis which can be fatal to humans, and is found in up to 20 per cent of all feral pigs in Queensland. For this reason, people should not handle feral pigs unless they have been slaughtered at licensed premises and checked for disease, and if you must handle feral pig meat, protective gear should be worn, such as gloves, apron and boots.

A major concern with the feral pig numbers in Australia is the threat of Foot and Mouth disease, and the rate at which it would spread throughout the pig population if it were to reach our shores.

For more information on the threat or spread of feral pigs visit www.dnrm.qld.gov.au



QLD RESOURCES WEEK

Queensland Resources Week was held 22-30 May. The event is an initiative of the Department of Natural Resources, Mine and Energy, to promote community awareness of Natural Resource Management.

Thanks to a grant awarded by DNRM & E, Southern Gulf Catchments was able to host a photographic exhibition. The display was entitled 'The Plains of Promise Photo Exhibition', based on how Lord John Stokes described the region in 1891. The exhibit showcased photographs of the North West Region, showing everything from cattle droving, wetlands, campgrounds and scenic shots of the entire area. The photos were provided by Mrs Jacqueline Curley from Gypsy Plains, and Mr Ken Isaacson, of Waanyi Heritage and Project Officer – Aboriginal Programs, at Southern Gulf Catchments.

Southern Gulf Catchments Communications Officer Jacqui McClure said "the display was

a success. We wanted to use the opportunity to promote Natural Resource Management to the region. Throughout the week we visited Kronsaurus Korner at Richmond, Julia Creek Shire Hall, Outback at Isa, and the Mount Isa Institute of TAFE."

The Minister for Natural Resources, Mines and Energy, Mr. Stephen Robertson visited the display on Wednesday afternoon at Outback at Isa. "The photo display shows initiative. It's such a unique area, the Southern Gulf, and the photos reflect that," he said.

Upon request from the Minister, the photos were then displayed in the foyer of Minerals House in Brisbane.

It is planned that later in the year, the photo display will be taken around the rest of North West Queensland. This will be in conjunction with Southern Gulf Catchments releasing the draft NRM Regional Plan back to the community for comments.

SGC Chairman Paul Woodhouse, MP Stephen Robertson, Minister for Natural Resources, Mines and Energy, and Emma Blacklock, Executive Officer.



Afternoon tea with the Minister
(Photos by Jacqui McClure)

(Photos by Jacqueline Curley)



AUSTRALIA'S RAREST BIRD

THE NIGHT PARROT *Pezoporus occidentalis*

The Night Parrot was last seen 80 years ago, though there have been reported sightings since. A campaign has begun to involve the public in the hunt for the Night Parrot.

The species is believed to live in Spinifex grassland areas and is generally only active at night. Night Parrots are about 24cms long and are mainly yellowish green with patches of dark brown, black and yellow, with arrowhead markings on the wings. If you are reasonably sure that you have sighted a Night Parrot call the number below. If you find a dead bird which you think may be a night parrot, wrap it in plastic and put it in the freezer before calling these numbers >>



Chris Crafter (Qld Parks and Wildlife Service, Mount Isa (w) 4744 7850
Ian Fox (Birds Australia) (h) 4743 8069 (w) 4744 7870

THE MARCUS OLDHAM RURAL LEADERSHIP PROGRAM 2004

By Jacqui McClure

'Building the rural leaders of tomorrow'; that is the motto behind the annual Marcus Oldham Rural Leadership program, held in Geelong VIC, June 27th – July 2nd, 2004. The program aims to not only build participants leadership abilities, but also develop the various skills required to be successful in a business environment.

Thirty six people participated in this year's program, and represented industries including banking, agriculture – beef, veal, lamb, wool, grain, dairy, cropping, poppies, as well as horticulture, apiculture, land drainage, accounting, journalism, and Natural Resource Management. Many of those attended as a part of a scholarship prize.

Glenda Wootton, a veal producer from Northern Tasmania, was awarded a scholarship co-sponsored by the Tasmanian Women in Agriculture Association and Toyota. "Marcus Oldham is the most prestigious Agricultural College in Australia. It prides itself on high quality participants each year."

Rob Modistach from 'Haddon Rig', outside of Warren in NSW, also went through a vigorous application process to attend the program and surpassed over 250 applicants to win the Sandy Robertson Young Riverina Ambassador Award, which is aimed at developing leadership skills within the merino industry.



Jacqui McClure – Marcus Oldham Rural Leadership Program

Southern Gulf Catchments sponsored their Communications Officer, Jacqui McClure, to attend the Program. Jacqui was one of only two Queenslanders to attend. "The diversity of the participants certainly made for a great week, with plenty of stories and information shared between everyone."

"The course enabled different industries involved in Australian agriculture, to not only learn and build their leadership skills, but to also raise concerns about rural Australia and where it is heading. Particular issues raised were the movement of young people off farms and into the cities, as well as sustainable farming techniques and practises."

Each evening a guest speaker addressed the Leadership Program. These included Mr Peter Flaherty, Editor of the Weekly Times, which is the primary Agricultural newspaper in Victoria. Mr Jack Spiers, an Australian Rural Leadership Program graduate, and McKell Medal Winner, spoke about 'What Leadership means to me'.

On the final evening of the Program, Ms Michele Levine, CEO of Roy Morgan Research addressed the group on 'the Challenges of Globalisation', and used data collected from Australia, the US, UK, and New Zealand to highlight a series of views, including that 88 per cent of Australian's believe that if 'we don't act now, we'll never control our environmental problems.'



Program Convenor Adrian Kenelly, VFF representative Jerome Carslake, Editor of the Weekly Times, Jack Spiers, and Rural Finance Banker Andrew Hedt.

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

M A INGHAM TRUST GRANTS

This grant funds preservation and education, research and increase of knowledge with respect to the origin, history, habits, life and use of Australian mammals, birds and the flora providing their food and cover. Applications can be submitted anytime and are processed on the Third Tuesday of August and November. For more information contact www.statetrustees.com.au or phone (03) 9667 6740.

MITRE 10 JUNIOR LANDCARE GRANTS PROGRAM FOR 2004

The closing dates for 2004 Grant applications for the Mitre 10 Junior Landcare Grants Program are 29 July and 21 October. Further information, application forms and guidelines are available at www.landcareaustralia.com.au or www.mitre10.com.au.

NORMAN WETTENHALL FOUNDATION GRANTS

This fund aims to support and encourage research, education and recording of all aspects of the natural living environment. The fund has, as its principles – innovative projects are to be encouraged and preferably act as a model for other developments in the future; the results have a long-term effect; publications of funded studies is regarded as important and will be supported; dissemination of information, which will benefit the natural living environment. Applications close 30 September 2004 and the maximum grant is \$10,000. Further information is available from Scott Anderson, Administrator on (03) 9650 3188 or scotta@ianpotter.org.au.

WEED SOCIETY OF QUEENSLAND

The Weed Society of Queensland assists groups to hold field days, publish literature and conduct promotional activities. Applications for their General Activity Sponsorships can be submitted throughout the year to a maximum of \$2,000. For more information visit www.wsq.org.au.

DESERT CHANNELS INDIGENOUS ENGAGEMENT WORKSHOP

By Ken Isaacson

Desert Channels Queensland (DCQ) hosted its Inaugural Indigenous Network Meeting in Longreach, 9th and 10th June.

The workshop aimed to begin the process of engaging the Indigenous people of DCQ. Ken Isaacson, Project Officer, Aboriginal Programs – NRM, represented Southern Gulf Catchments at the meeting.

The project will ensure that Traditional Owners and Indigenous people will be represented in the Natural Resource Management of the Desert Channels region.

Another aim of the project was to ensure that community field officers use the opinions and advice from Indigenous Communities.

Major outcomes of the meeting included the need to provide understanding of Natural Resource Management to the Indigenous community, through the promotion of Desert Channels Queensland.

There is also a need to identify Indigenous issues within the region, as well as on-ground projects that directly affect the community. Finally, it is essential to keep Indigenous communities informed of NRM issues, and to get them involved in DCQ as soon as possible.

The Indigenous Engagement Workshop was very positive, and concluded that Desert Channels will hold 4 community meetings over the next 12 months, and 2 meetings a year from then on.



Participants at the Desert Channels Aboriginal Engagement Workshop.
(photo by Ken Isaacson)



Gregory River
(photo by Tyson Smalley)

GREGORY RIVER CAMPING BAN

Plans by the Burke Shire Council to fence off and ban overnight camping along the Gregory River are supported by Southern Gulf Catchments. Charles Curry, Programs Development Officer for SGC said, “As a natural resource management organisation we’ve always had a very keen interest in the protection of the beautiful rivers of this region. So we’re very happy to hear that Burke is taking such positive action.”

The actions by Burke Shire Council come as a result of years of over-use and pollution of the river banks and surrounding areas. Of particular concern, are campers using the river as a bathing, toilet and vehicle washing facility. Communities downstream who rely on the river as a domestic water source are subjected to polluted, potentially infectious water, for no reason other than visitors are not willing to use the facilities in the township. Campers are also leaving a lot of waste and rubbish around the area, costing the Burke Shire Council up to \$40,000 per year in clean-up fees. There is also a lot of damage to vegetation along the river, and to the overall biodiversity of flora and fauna in the area.

The plan to fence off the area will be enacted immediately, with (at the time of writing) signs and fences being erected. In a recent radio interview, Mr Craig Turnour, CEO of Burke Shire Council was asked if he thought this was a drastic measure. He replied “...it is a drastic measure...but it’s reached a stage now where the majority of people do not care about where they defecate and it really is a major environmental health problem.”

The Natural Resource Management Plan being prepared by Southern Gulf Catchments includes an education campaign that makes visitors to the region aware of the impact their behaviour has upon our environment. It also identifies key stakeholders, such as the relevant agencies, community groups and Shire Councils who need to work together to protect the Gregory River and other waterways of the region.

Will the ban solve the problem? Mr Curry said “There will be a certain element tourists that will try and disregard these attempts to improve the situation. Unfortunately this is always going to be the case. Barricades might be the only way to stop people actually using these sites.”

NHT2 INTERIM FUNDING AGREEMENT

Southern Gulf Catchments has recently received the contracts for five project proposals, under the Natural Heritage Trust Interim Funding Agreement. The project applications were prepared in February, finalised in April and have now been approved to the value of \$540,000.

The projects include:

1. ‘Conservation and Management of the Stock Route Network in the Southern Gulf Catchments.’
2. ‘Gulf Riparian Management (Gregory Downs)’.
3. ‘Weed management strategic proposals in Southern Gulf Catchments.’

4. ‘Preliminary identification of fish biodiversity and threatened freshwater habitats of the Southern Gulf Catchment Rivers for conservation priorities and planning.’
5. ‘Support for Indigenous natural resource management through a strategic resource inventory of native vegetation and its uses by Traditional Owners in the Karumba Plains province of Gulf Plains bioregion.’

The projects were developed after extensive consultation with participating parties. The Programs Development Officer for Southern Gulf Catchments, Charles Curry, said “These projects cover a broad range of natural resource management issues in Southern Gulf Catchments. They include a freshwater fish survey and a vegetation project to better

understand indigenous foods and medicines along the Gulf coast. Also included is the means to improve the management of stock routes in several shires. The projects will ensure the necessary continuation of six strategic weed control projects in the catchments of the Flinders, Cloncurry, Leichhardt and Gregory/Nicholson Rivers. Funding has also been secured to assist in capacity building of the Gulf Catchments Pest Task Force (a cross-regional project involving ten shires) and further conservation and protection of the fragile riparian environment of the iconic Gregory River.

The continued support and encouragement of the Natural Heritage Trust and relevant State and Commonwealth government agencies is greatly appreciated.”

JUST SITTING BACK AND WATCHING THE CATTLE GROW!

(A DAY IN LIFE OF OUTBACK AUSTRALIA)

by Ashley Gallagher

Event: Droving 104 head of steers – Normanton to Uralla (about 90 kms down the Iffley road)

Saturday Participants: Mick Gallagher (Cook & Toyota Driver), Ashley Gallagher, Ross Barkworth, Kurt Sivyer, Kev Cardew, Toni & Bonnie Thomson

(Bignels to Peartree Yards: 32 kilometres)

Ashley, Ross & Kurt kicked off with the cattle at 7 o'clock in the morning at the Bignels Paddock, while Mick went to pick up the rest of the 'men' - Kev, Toni & Bonnie.

They caught up with us about 7:30, and that's when the adventure really started. We hadn't gone another kilometre, when Big Kev had to get off and tie his water bottle up. (As the building inspector for the local council, this day was just a weekend learning experience for a novice horseman.) When Kev tried to re-mount, his horse (Sox) trotted off, and Kev ended up behind the saddle instead of in it! It only took a couple of strides for Sox to work out that his rider was NOT where he was supposed to be, so Sox dropped a couple of bucks in to him, and Big Kev (all 6-foot, 120 kg of him!) hit the ground with a loud OOMPH! It took a couple of minutes for him to even move, but to his credit, by the time Ashley caught his horse, he was ready to get back in the saddle.

The rest of the day was fairly uneventful. It was one of the hottest, muggiest days of the summer. By 4 o'clock in the afternoon, 32 kilometres later, when we arrived at Peartree Yards, everyone was happy to unsaddle, and let their horses go. Kev was probably the most grateful of all for the day's end. Inside sources report that he couldn't get out of his chair at work until at least Tuesday!

Sunday Participants: Mick Gallagher (Cook & Toyota Driver), Ashley Gallagher, Ross Barkworth

(Peartree to Milgarra: 22 kilometres)

After the excitement of Day 1, Day 2 was fairly uneventful. That is until about 2 o'clock when had an inch or two of rain dumped on us. The seven kilometres from Milgarra to the bitumen, towing the horsefloat, took at least 2 hours. We had to unload the horse, and ride him for half that distance, to reduce the weight in the horsefloat. Just that little exercise should have warned us what was in store for tomorrow!

Participants: Mick Gallagher (Cook & Toyota Driver), Ashley Gallagher, Ross Barkworth & Bommer Rice

All out of bed at 4.00am. By 5.00am we were on the road and left town for Milgarra Station. Once we turned off the bitumen it only took 1 hour to drive the 7 kilometres in the black soil, as we didn't have the horsefloat. Got the horses saddled up and let the cattle out of the yard and on the road again. At 7.30am it started to rain. The cattle were still travelling well at this stage even if the men were getting saturated! Everything was going pretty well, until we get to 'Connors Yard' about lunchtime. Ashley and Bommer went to chase the 'stray' cattle away from the grid (The cattle were congregating there because the ground is higher). One old bull stuck his head in the air, saw Bommer, and tried his best to run him down! Bommer avoided him, but the Old Bull heads straight through our mob, snorting, on his way down the road. The plant horses take fright and take off back down the road. We tried to catch them in the Toyota but they were going faster than the vehicle could go in the mud. Mick had to stop and go back to the cattle.

Lunch was a 'wet affair' eaten in the rain. Given that it was only lunchtime, and they only had 19 kilometres to go, Ashley & Rosco decide to take the cattle on, while Bommer goes back after the horses. He finally tracks the horses down at the Boundary – 19 kms back. The horses see him and take fright again and jump the grid and are heading for home. Luckily Ian Bowker sees them and blocks them up at the next grid near the Milgarra house. They had



Approaching storm on Emu Plains
(Photo by Tyson Smalley)

Cattle Mustering
(Photo by Jacqueline Curley)



travelled a distance of 26kms. Bommer eventually catches up with them about 20 minutes later and puts them in a paddock.

In the meantime, the road is getting wetter and boggy, the cattle and horses are getting tired, not to mention the men!

The Toyota could not go past the Wondoola turn-off but Ashley & Ross continued on with the cattle. The final 2 or 3 kilometres of road is knee-deep mud. The cattle are tired and the horses are exhausted on the verge of collapse. Ashley and Ross walked the last kilometre or so, leading their horses. They finally got the cattle to the paddock at 7.00pm that night.

Ashley & Rosco were now faced with a dilemma, they couldn't ride the horses back to the Toyota, as the horses were buggered and they would have nowhere to let them go, so the only other option was to walk. They left their saddles & boots and started on their 7 kilometre trek back to the vehicle.

There is an old saying that goes: "I stick to Queensland up & down but it is only when it is raining hard that Queensland sticks to me" and this was very true that night in the black soil. Next to be discarded was their mud caked jeans somewhere along the track. Luckily the road was too boggy for any other cars to come along what they would have made of two ringers walking the road wearing nothing but shirts and hats is anybody's guess!

After an hour and a half of trudging through the bog, Ashley and Ross see the lights of a vehicle. They mistakenly think "Thank God, Mick is still trying to get down the road to us!" A few minutes later, when the lights turn around, and the taillights start to disappear ... well, let's just say the air was blue! Now they were not only half-naked, but heartbroken as well! In their words "The arse fell clean out of us!"

It was then that Ashley and Ross decided that they would go as far as the Wondoola turn-off, and the vehicle could come pick them up in the morning. Another half hour of walking, and they realized that it wasn't Mick's Toyota lights that had abandoned them Mick was still waiting where they had left him 5 hours previous. It took another half hour to finally make it to the Toyota both Ashley and Ross were on the verge of collapse.

The forty one kilometres back to the bitumen took 3? hours of slipping, and sliding, and slush and rain and cold and misery. They finally arrived back in town at 1.00am in the morning, very mud caked and very weary.

It didn't end there for Ross as he then couldn't wake Christy up to get into the house and spent the night in the doghouse!

All in a day's work. And as a city slicker once said, "All you cattlemen have to do is: SIT BACK AND WATCH THE CATTLE GROW!"



Kellie Nilsson

NEW STAFF MEMBER CONSERVATION OFFICER

Kellie has recently graduated from Deakin University with a Bachelor of Applied Science in Integrated Catchment Management. Kellie is new to the Southern Gulf region having moved here from the Yarra Valley. She has worked in a number of different positions and industries, most recently, working on a dairy farm near Warrnambool. She loves a good red wine, the occasional game of netball and is keen to learn more about the North West.



Southern Gulf Catchments

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If you have a question or story idea
phone 07 4743 1888 or free call 1800 676 242.

You can also email
Communications@southerngulfcatchments.com.au

Have you checked out the new Southern Gulf Catchments website? It contains information about natural resource management, the NRM Regional Plan, team members, and weekly news updates. A NRM survey is also available on the website, which provides us with your views and concerns on Natural Resource Management in the North West region.