

2.4. GRAZING

Grazing is the most extensive land use in the catchment. It has supplied a relatively stable economy and infrastructure base despite the fluctuating mining activity in the watershed. Properties tend to be large, with low intensity management applied. Much of the grazing lands in the Mitchell are nutrient poor, increasing the value and importance of river frontage where soil fertility is greatest. Over an area such as the Mitchell, with its seasonality, isolation, transport and infrastructure limitations, the industry faces many challenges. The development of live export markets in Karumba offers new opportunity for the grazing industry in the Mitchell.

The environmental impacts of grazing in the Mitchell can not be attributed to any single factor. Cattle are attracted to virtually all permanent waters in the Mitchell. Landscape forming processes have created narrow ribbons of phosphorus sufficient soils along many of the river frontages. Pasture, ground cover and fuel loading can decline over large areas due to grazing pressure. These are contributing factors to weed and land degradation problems. Road and track networks to service the industry often lead to erosion problems. Many of these issues can only be addressed in the context of property management planning and must be linked with stock management needs.

Much of the catchment is divided into blocks of in excess of 500km² so there is commonly a variation in the quality and capability of the land types across the property. These variations stem from differences in underlying geology, landform, soil and vegetation types. In some areas even rainfall varies significantly across a single property. Sustainable grazing management requires that cattle and property management adequately reflect these variations. There is a need to identify, promote and utilise grazing practices that will support a viable grazing industry now and in the future while not impinging on other natural resources.

Technology exists to allow producers with a large enough area and enough cattle to develop their enterprise into a profitable business that is both economically and environmentally sustainable. This requires significant management effort and low debt levels. While there are numerous examples of “bad” management, there are also examples of pro-active and intensive management in the catchment.

The difference between grazing in the Mitchell catchment and that in many other areas of Queensland is that the land will only sustain low density grazing. This means that income per hectare is comparatively low. In most cases the landholder has at least 100 years of data on their property and can see what management practises need to be

changed but can not afford it in current economic terms. Landholders and industry groups are now looking for incentives and discounts from government and supply companies to enable them to become more economically viable, to compete with landholders in areas of higher yield and to make the changes to farming practises that will make the property more environmentally sustainable.

Cattle markets are evolving with the changing requirements of final consumers. To meet these demands, cattle producers must actively manage cattle growth. This requires more intensive cattle management and comprehensive production planning. A group of producers in the Mitchell catchment have begun processes to improve such planning. With the assistance of Beef Production staff from the Queensland Department of Primary Industries (DPI), they are documenting land types and management requirements, cattle management regimes and issues affecting their property management with a view to identifying best management practices. Known as a Local Consensus Data Group (LCD) it is an excellent vehicle to pool insight and understanding for those producers who are thoughtfully planning their property management. It is a commendable effort and should be supported and encouraged.

This interaction and group planning could also provide a strong basis for integrated catchment planning in the Mitchell. Ideally, property planning should integrate the full range of management issues on a property.

Grazing must also contend with practices that encroach on their property. Mining exploration, recreation and tourism, recreational pig hunters and weeds do not always respect boundary fences and will be best addressed in conjunction with other land managers to achieve the best outcomes from management efforts. Cultural heritage sites and traditional access rights should also be incorporated in property management.



Figure 10 Watering points such as this relieve pressures on riparian areas.

Goal:

*A sustainable grazing industry integrating
environmental, economic
and cultural values*

Objectives:

- To sustainably manage grazing land with current best management practices
- To pro-actively manage properties with reference to indicators of sustainability
- Improved information sharing between neighbouring properties, government departments, experts in pest management and other Mitchell River Watershed stakeholders.

Strategies:

Education

GM1 Promote a greater understanding of pasture and rangeland ecology

Information and Communication

GM2 Identify indicators of sustainability and develop monitoring programs

GM3 Identify and promote best management practices

Improving Resource Management

GM4 Encourage and promote the Local Consensus Data group process and *Futureprofit* as management planning tools

GM5 Assess land suitability for grazing in the Mitchell River catchment

Adopting a Cooperative Approach

GM6 Develop improved systems for sharing resource information between stakeholder groups

Outcomes:

- Graziers educated about grazing impacts and their causes.
- Identification and monitoring of factors on which sustainable grazing industry depends.
- All grazing properties will have undertaken the development of Property Management Plans.
- Successful communication between graziers and other Mitchell River Watershed stakeholders.

Strategy GM1

Promote a greater understanding of pasture and rangeland ecology

Actions	Stakeholders	Performance Indicators	Priority	Cross Reference to
Collect existing information and research pasture and rangeland ecology of the MRW	DPI, DNR, MRWVG, Graziers, Produce industry reps.	publication on 'MRW Pasture & Ecology'	★	
Conduct field days involving graziers and experts on pasture and rangeland ecology	DPI, Landholders	1 every 5 years	★★	WE3 FM4 WQ1 GM5
Assist with the distribution of pasture and ecology information	MRWVG, DPI		★★	

Strategy GM2

Identify indicators of sustainability and develop monitoring programs

Actions	Stakeholders	Performance Indicators	Priority	Cross Reference to
Workshop with graziers to identify factors upon which the grazing industry depends	Landholders, MRWVG, DPI	1 initial workshop 1 per 2years thereafter	★	
Investigate and identify effective monitoring systems for the factors identified above	DPI, CSIRO		★★	LD3
Set up trial areas to monitor effects from various management regimes	DPI, Landholders		★	FM3
Develop and distribute information packages to graziers on the results from monitoring of trial areas	MRWVG, DPI, Landholders		★★	

Strategy GM3

Identify and promote best management practices

Actions	Stakeholders	Performance Indicators	Priority	Cross Reference to
Survey graziers on current management practices (either as part of a LCD group or individually)	DPI, MRWVG,		★	WE3 LD1
Invite graziers to be involved in regular property "tours" to showcase different management practices and results	Landholders, DPI, MRWVG	2 tours/year	★	LD2 GM5
Compile and develop a "take home" pack of best management practices notes	DPI, MRWVG		★★	
Provide and display best management practice information at field days etc.	MRWVG, DPI,		★★	
Investigate incentives available for the implementation of best management practices	DNR, DPI, Industry groups		★★	

Strategy GM4Encourage and promote the Local Consensus Data group process, *Futureprofit* and the "Smart Manager" benchmarking process as management tools.

Actions	Stakeholders	Performance Indicators	Priority	Cross Reference to
Assist with advertising LCD groups, <i>Futureprofit</i> and Smart Manager workshops	DPI, MRWVG		★★	
Identify continued funding for property management planning	MRWVG		★★★	AG6
Invite graziers to participate in workshops	Landholders, DPI, MRWVG		★★	GM2

Priorities Achieved By:

★ 1 - 2 years

★★ 2 - 3 years

★★★ 3 - 5 years

Strategy GM5

Develop improved systems for sharing resource information between stakeholder groups

Actions	Stakeholders	Performance Indicators	Priority	Cross Reference to
Involve community in field days or "property tours" to reinforce communication ties	DPI, MRWVG	2/Year	★★	GM1 GM3
Hold information days inviting speakers from various stakeholder groups and backgrounds	MRWVG, Other stakeholders	1/year	★	FM6

Priorities Achieved By:

★ 1 - 2 years

★★ 2 - 3 years

★★★ 3 - 5 years