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GRAZING LAND MANAGEMENT AT THE CATCHMENT SCALE – A NEIGHBOURLY APPROACH!

J. Mills and D. Murray

Fitzroy River & Coastal Catchments Inc, PO Box 288, Rockhampton Queensland 4700

INTRODUCTION

Tackling catchment scale grazing land management issues such as weeds, salinity and water quality can be quite challenging. In partnership with the Fitzroy Basin Association, Fitzroy River & Coastal Catchments Inc (FRCC) have used a 'Neighbourhood Catchment' approach to improve grazing land management and achieve catchment outcomes in the Central Queensland region.

The neighbourhood catchment approach has been used to successfully deliver extension services and an incentive scheme to assist landholders to adopt improved management practices.

Since January 2005, 55 landholders in 4 priority neighbourhood catchments have worked with FRCC to develop land management projects valued at 1.8 million dollars. Landholder contributions far exceed the amount of external funding committed towards these natural resource management projects.

A FOCUSED APPROACH

Through the neighbourhood catchment approach, FRCC works with individual landholders and groups to address natural resource concerns at both the property and catchment scale. Existing social networks, along with the natural watershed, are used to define the size and boundaries of a Neighbourhood Catchment. The catchment areas are small enough to allow landholders to have ownership of the land and water issues associated with their "neighbourhood". Social networks are used to encourage participation in extension and funding opportunities from landholders across the catchment.

FRCC has directed resources including extension services and incentive funding towards neighbourhood catchments that have been prioritised through a process that considers biodiversity values, salinity risk, sediment delivery, presence of weeds and the level of community activity. The localities selected for FRCC's Neighbourhood Catchment activities were Alligator Creek (1 141 km²), Hedlow Creek (259 km²), Woodbury-Bungundarra (255 km²) and the Upper Fitzroy River (1 430 km²). These areas are predominantly used for agricultural purposes such as grazing and beef production and small amounts of horticulture, forestry, dairy and cropping.

Information associated with the adoption of improved land management practices is delivered to landholders within priority neighbourhood catchments through one-on-one extension and as group workshops. Property visits are used by Field Officers to meet with landholders and their families to discuss and plan the application of improved management practices on their property. Group workshops are facilitated to discuss land and water management issues and solutions at the catchment scale. As part of their extension service, Field Officers provide landholders with a direct link to professional land management advice available through government agencies, consultants and the Fitzroy Basin Association's Technical Officers.

Funding delivered through the National Action Plan for Salinity & Water Quality and the Natural Heritage Trust Extension has been used to offset the cost associated with implementing land management activities for landholders within priority catchments. Field Officers have assisted landholders to develop project plans and apply for this funding. The FRCC Management Committee (consisting of representatives from a diverse range of community stakeholder groups) have played an important role in reviewing and assessing funded projects.

Monitoring sites have been established within each priority neighbourhood catchment to detect and record changes associated with the implementation of improved land management practices. Parameters including water quality, ground cover, land condition and water use efficiency are measured to detect change at both the property and catchment scale. The development of monitoring programs, site selection and the ongoing collection of monitoring information has been landholder driven.

Participation within neighbourhood catchment activities has been strengthened through a capacity building program including workshops, field days and bus trips focused on the following topics:

- Grazing land management and pasture identification;
- Monitoring land condition and improving forage budgeting;
- Water quality monitoring and testing;
- Fire Management, bushland management, weed management for small blocks;
- Property Management Planning and Topographic mapping;
- Weed identification and control strategies; and
- Improving soil health.

In summary, the FRCC Neighbourhood Catchment process includes the following key steps:

- Community engagement through phone calls, information sessions and mail-outs targeting landholders in the priority area;
- Property visits and group workshops to provide information associated with improved management practices;
- An incentive program for on-ground works delivered through individual and group project development and property planning activities;
- A follow-up monitoring program to detect change at both the catchment and property scale; and
- A capacity building program designed around the needs of the target community and delivered through workshops, field days, bus trips and further one-on-one extension.

Achieving results

Through the neighbourhood catchment program, landholders have strongly demonstrated they are willing to adopt improved grazing land management practices and participate in activities to improve the health of their catchment. Neighbourhood Catchment on-ground projects broadly consist of the following activities:

- Development of property management plans including a list of actions and an up to date satellite image of each landholder's property;
- Riparian fencing and off-stream watering systems on grazing properties;
- Improving cropping practices;
- Strategic catchment scale weed control;
- Protecting remnant vegetation and biodiversity values;
- Improving the management of salinity affected areas;

- Improving the management of wetlands;
- Water use efficiency initiatives on horticultural properties; and
- Monitoring at the property and catchment scale.

Within a priority neighbourhood catchment more than 50% of landholders have participated in activities to improve the health of their catchment. Combined with the effective delivery of information and planning support, incentive funding has proved to be a powerful tool to assist landholders to adopt improved land management practices. Table 1 provides a summary of the project outcomes that have been achieved as part of the neighbourhood catchment program.

**Table 1: A Summary of FRCC Neighbourhood Catchment Project Outcomes
(July 2005 – June 2006)**

	Total Outcomes
Length of rivers & creeks directly influenced by changes in management practices	87 kms
Area of land under improved management practices (weeds, grazing to land types, salinity management)	10 779 ha
Area of land under improved farming practices (cropping)	190 ha
Number of properties adopting water use efficiency initiatives	12
Area of land being managed specifically for protecting biodiversity values	876 ha

CONCLUSION

Fitzroy River and Coastal Catchments Inc. have found the neighbourhood catchment approach successfully overcomes the challenges of tackling catchment scale grazing land management issues. Working within a neighbourhood catchment allows landholders to work together to address natural resource concerns at both the property scale as individuals and at the catchment scale as a group. The neighbourhood catchment approach taps into existing social networks to encourage participation in extension and funding opportunities across a catchment. Outcomes associated with the delivery of resources including extension services and incentive funding is maximised by focusing on priority catchment areas. Combined with the effective delivery of information and planning support, incentive funding has proved to be a powerful tool to assist landholders to adopt improved land management practices. High levels of participation and on ground results have demonstrated the value of the neighbourhood catchment approach to improve grazing land management at the catchment scale.