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Katherine Rural Review

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Regional Round-Up

Neil MacDonald, Regional Director DPIFM Katherine

As the year draws towards a close I would like to wish everyone a very Happy Christmas and best wishes for 2007. I hope you look back on 2006 as having been an excellent year.

A very significant event passed almost unnoticed in the last month. We finished our fieldwork at Mt Sanford station in the VRD. The Department has been conducting experiments in pasture utilisation and stocking rates on a 65 sq km site at Blackgin since 1993. We have finished working there because we feel that we have learnt enough from this site and we are unable to start new studies without finishing old ones. It has been a remarkable trial, as it has shown that the Katherine Region has the potential to produce much more than it's usually given credit for, without endangering our well managed native pastures. Mt Sanford has been a big part of our lives for many years and in many ways we are sorry to see it end. I would like to publicly acknowledge and thank Paul and Jane Stone for their warm friendship and their wise advice over the years.

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For further information please contact 08 89739739

There have been several changes around our office over the last month. Simone White has moved over to Pastoral Production to take on an extension role for the next few months. Her position managing FarmBis has been taken by Jane Jackson who has been our Executive Officer. I wish both Simone and Jane good luck in their new roles.

Quarantine duties are currently being handled by Andy Mullins who has come down from Darwin and seems to have settled in well.

I am about to go on long service leave, off to South America, and I won't be back till the last week in March. For this period Simone White will be acting Regional Director. Please feel free to contact her on any matter.

Wishing you all a safe, happy, and above all wet, Christmas.

New FarmBis contact

Simone White, Extension Officer, DPIFM Pastoral Production

Your friendly new face in the FarmBis office at KRS is Jane Jackson. Jane will be taking over the FarmBis helm until the 30th of January while Simone White is undertaking various other jobs within the Department. Jane comes to the FarmBis position with a wealth of knowledge and experience in the Katherine region, most recently as Executive Officer at KRS. Please contact Jane on 8973 9792 with any FarmBis queries.



The Mt Sanford grazing trial: The conclusion of 13 years of research

Trisha Cowley, Technical Officer, DPIFM Pastoral Production

A trial designed to investigate sustainable grazing management strategies began on Mt Sanford Station in 1993. It was a collaborative project between Heytesbury beef and DPIFM. Thirteen years and 26 sets of pasture and animal data later, the last biannual pasture sampling and muster was carried out in late October this year.



picture by Caroline Smith

Originally the trial was born out of a concern that grazing was occurring at unsustainable rates, and that a deterioration in land condition, productivity and biodiversity would result. At the time the average paddock size in the VRD was 200km² and stocking rates averaged 11 AE/km². While this translates to relatively low stocking rates, grazing was very uneven, with areas around water being overgrazed while further reaches of paddocks were relatively untouched.

The initial phase of the trial (1994-2000) examined a set stocking system in which utilisation rates varied with seasonal pasture growth. The trial was carried out in small paddocks (4-8km²) and examined stocking rates of 5-15 head/km² (utilisation rates averaged 7-20%). There was no obvious negative effect on land condition across any of the treatments. It appeared that the boundaries of the system had not been really tested at this stage, and that the land could safely carry a lot more cattle with increased infrastructure. The Pigeonhole Project was partially born out of a need to investigate the ability of the land to carry higher numbers at a commercial scale.

A second phase of the Mt Sanford Grazing Trial was then developed and ran it from 2000 to 2006. This time a set utilisation and variable stocking system was used in which previous lower utilisation treatments (6-7%) were abandoned and higher rates added (35 and 45%). Animal numbers were adjusted each May to achieve a constant utilisation rate (the proportion of the pasture that grows each year that is consumed by the cattle). There was some indication that utilisation levels above 25% were leading to reduced land condition and productivity.

The following is a summary of the results.

- Above 25% utilisation, ground cover in October was below 40% (recommended threshold) from 2003 onward
- After the dry wet of 2003 there was a reduced ability of pasture to recover in the higher utilisation rates (31-45%)
- Weaning percentage decreased as utilisation increased in 2004 and 2005
- Kg/km² of weaner increased as utilisation increased, until after the dry season of 2003 - since then production has remained the same across treatments

It appears that the dry year of 2003 put enough pressure on the system that differences began to be seen between the higher and lower utilisation treatments. It seems that the land did not have the same ability to recover at higher utilisation levels and land condition, not to mention cattle production, suffered as a result.

Industry Implications

The Mt Sanford Trial found that significantly higher utilisation rates (up to 25%) than the current regional practice can be safely used. However, this does require increased infrastructure in the form of smaller paddocks and more watering points which encourage more even grazing of the landscape. Flexible stocking to match animal numbers to forage availability is also important.



picture of cattle at Mt Sanford grazing trial

The preliminary results of the Mt Sanford Grazing Trial were presented at the Australian Rangelands Conference and at the Katherine Research Station. The final report will be released at the next Pigeonhole field day. For more information on this project, contact Robyn Cowley, Rangeland Research Officer at KRS on 8973 9750.

DNA markers for tenderness and marbling in bulls in the Brahman/Composite program

Gehan Jayawardhana Ph: 0409-699544

This year 17 Brahman and 19 Composite homebred herd bulls from the Brahman and Composite program at DDRF and VRRS were Genestar® DNA marker tested for tenderness and marbling. This was done at a cost of \$55 per head through the Australian Brahman Breeders Association who have a volume deal with Genetic Solutions, the company that does the testing. The test uses a hair sample (including hair roots) which is plucked from an animal's tail.

The test measures whether an animal has the tender or tough forms of each of the four tenderness genes available and marbling or non-marbling forms of the three pairs of available marbling genes. Each advantageous gene is represented as a star so, for example, the most tender is eight star and the least is zero star.

These genes account for about 30% of the variation in tenderness and marbling. Other genes responsible for feeding, temperament (for tenderness) and environmental conditions account for the rest of the variation.

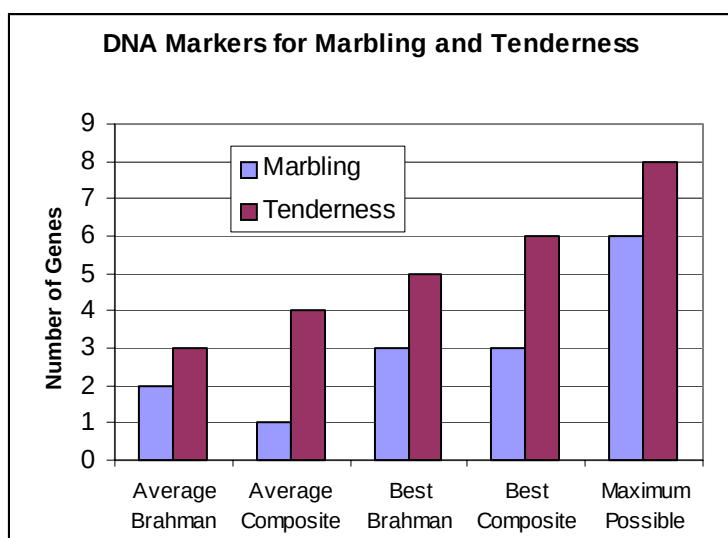
Analysis of 3000 carcasses has shown that tenderness increases with the number of stars. This was measured by reduction in shear force from 5.4 with 0 stars to 4.9 with 8 stars. Similarly marbling increases from a score of 4.5 with 0 stars to 5.8 with 5 stars.

The real importance of the tenderness result is that the number of unacceptably tough carcasses at a shear force of greater than six drops from 22% at Genestar® tenderness of 0 stars to 2% at Genestar® tenderness of 8 stars.

In a northern supermarket situation tenderness is more important than marbling though neither is currently important for live export.

The bulls that are selected as herd bulls at DDRF are sampled at yearling and the results are used in the selection at two and three. A summary of the gene frequencies is shown in the graph.

The average frequency of the tenderness genes were higher in the composites but, surprisingly, more marbling genes existed in the Brahmans.



Reference : Genetic Solutions Technical Update May 2006 – GeneSTAR Marbling 3 and GeneSTAR Tenderness 4 are the latest DNA tests available from Genetic Solutions.

Is the Top End a land of water and opportunity?

Julie Bird, Regional Team Leader, Crops, Forestry and Horticulture DPIFM

The Australian National Committee on Irrigation and Drainage recently held their national conference in Darwin. Many came with misconceptions about our mythical and abundant land. It must have been mind blowing for southern irrigators to witness the Ord River Scheme and the irrigated orchards of the Northern Territory. Even the lush green Darwin gardens must have been a 'blast from the past' for many!

Dreams, Schemes and Reality

It is believed that climate change is making southern and eastern Australia drier, while the Top End is getting wetter. Schemes to pipe our valuable water to southern irrigation areas and cities have been hot in the press in recent times. Other journalism has promoted the idea of southern irrigators moving their businesses to the north. The ANCID conference was timely in giving irrigators and other stakeholders a "big picture" view of the Top End and its potential. Speakers included scientists, farmers, politicians and environmentalists. With the obvious gravity of the water situation nationwide, all were keen to listen to each other and work together on this monumental issue.

It is hoped that the conference has helped the southern irrigators to realise why the north is keen to protect its valuable assets, including water, and learn from the mistakes that were made in other states. While we are extremely fortunate to have much more water than they do, it must be protected from wholesale plundering in order to protect the wonderful environmental and cultural aspects of the north. Development opportunities for irrigation in the north are promising, but must happen in a sustainable manner.

Water Saving Innovations

Another fascinating aspect of this conference was the innovative new technology appearing world wide, reducing the amount of water irrigators need to use. Autonomic tensiometers and leaf sensors, which top up the soil water as required, are a way of letting your trees control their own irrigation. While early work with drip irrigation in tree crops was inconclusive, now that irrigators in countries such as Israel are using constant fertigation techniques, drip has become a success. Other water saving innovations includes using perlite products and plastic mulch under orchard trees. The latest citrus irrigation scheduling in the USA involves watering every day, instead of every few days, as this is believed to slow the water usage of the tree down.



One of the many positive outcomes of this conference is that many irrigators and other stakeholders in the water debate have now seen our Top End in all its glory, abundance, and fragility. Hopefully, this insight will help to ensure that the right decisions are made for a sustainable future in irrigation farming for the Top End. If anyone is interested in reading the papers from this conference please contact Julie Bird at the Katherine Research Station on 89739738.

Interview with KPIAC chair

Trudi Oxley, DPIFM Pastoral Production

The 2004 Pastoral Survey indicated there were a lot of producers in the Katherine region who weren't really sure of the role of the Katherine Pastoral Industry Advisory Committee (KPIAC). This series of interviews is aimed at giving people an idea of who is involved and what KPIAC does. Keith Holzwart from Avago Station has been the chairman of KPIAC since the end of 2005. I asked him about his thoughts on the committee and what it achieves.

Can you give us a quick overview on your business and the area you represent?

Avago Station is medium sized breeder operation situated near Daly Waters on the southern end of the Sturt Plateau. I guess I have an appreciation of issues that are faced by people in the Southern Katherine region, particularly the Sturt Plateau, but also those common to family operations. As chair, anyone in the Katherine region could potentially contact me to raise issues. Avago is a developing property, but basically we are a store turnoff operation, depending on market conditions we supply live export, domestic feedlots or when conditions allow, turnoff bullocks. An example of the type of issue we are trying to solve on Avago is producing a beast that can be sold into any market. We are also trying to get a good appreciation for the productivity of our country, which is a mixture of roughly 40% deep red loams, 20 % gravely red soil and 40% grey and yellow clays associated with flood out country that has Bluegrass, Mitchell and Flinders on it.

Can you describe KPIAC in your words?

KPIAC is two fold, it's a local producer's conduit to influence local government direction on research and development, the committee prioritises local issues for consideration of funding. Just as importantly it is our region's opportunity to shape or initiate producer research that is funded by MLA (on a federal level). It is our chance to influence where our research levy is spent across northern Australia.

Who can be on it and what is their role?

Members are selected on the basis of industry recommendations with approval by the minister. It is made up of industry personnel, including mainly producers, with some representation from industry support organisations such as agents, the NT Live Exporters Association, NT Cattleman's Association representatives, DPIFM and DNRETA representatives, and also a member representing the general community. Meetings are occasionally open to non-committee members to participate. The committee member's role is to provide an opinion which is representative for their area. The aim is to have producer members that represent the various districts and enterprise types within the Katherine region. The committee is a diverse cross section of the community with a charter to gather as many opinions as possible.

What has your role in KPIAC been?

I have been acting as the chair of KPIAC. As chair on a local level I am responsible for coordinating the role of the committee. On a Northern Australia level as chair I am responsible for putting forward and arguing the case of any Katherine region projects approved by the local committee, ensuring they receive funding through the MLA Northern Beef Program.

What has been the most memorable achievement of KPIAC during your period of involvement?

I think the most memorable achievement has been seeing projects initiated by KPIAC such as the Best Practice Manual come to fruition. All projects that we have put up to MLA this year have got

through in principle. Another positive is seeing the co-operation between different departments through involvement with KPIAC membership, as well as the people KPIAC targets to invite to meetings and initiate links with. A major highlight has been seeing the dedication of members to represent their local areas.

What have you gained personally from being a KPIAC member?

I have gained a better understanding and insight of the complexities of the research, development and extension issues of the red meat industry and an appreciation for the difficulties in disseminating research information and how to achieve uptake of that information. Being a member of KPIAC means you broaden your own network of contacts for information, it allows sharing of information and solutions with other producers and the best researchers in Northern Australia. I have gained access to a wider field of information that relates directly to my business.

Why is KPIAC important?

Producers are responsible for their own research and development, anyone who has a complaint and is not proactive, has no reason for complaint as through KPIAC the mechanisms exist for any producer to raise an issue and potentially have something done about it. Because of the interaction, the perceived barriers between producers and researchers is being eroded as a more common language and direction is being created.

Any other comments?

Just that we would like producers to be aware that a new program needs to be created for Kidman Springs - using priorities created through the KPIAC network and the Pastoral Industry Survey we aim to build this program to ensure it falls within the priorities of producers.

If you have any research, development or extension issues that need to be raised, just contact your local KPIAC representative who will put it to the committee.

Contacts Trudi Oxley 89739763 Keith Holzwart 89759974

The 2006 NT mango season

Greg Owens, Senior Extension Officer, DPIFM, Crops Forestry and Horticulture

The 2006 NT mango season was one of those excellent seasons that only come along every six or seven years, the previous one in 1999. It was a long production period of 10 weeks with little rain and less overlap between Darwin and Katherine than was originally predicted due to the prolonged cold October weather in Katherine. It has been a season of high production and good prices, an unusual combination but an indication that the consumer public was happy with the product and continued to buy mangoes through the season.

The long production period allowed for good utilisation of packing and transport infrastructure and available labour. Pre-planning for labour and transport requirements by the NT Horticulture Association and NT Mango Industry Association and the allied industries, based on the NT DPIFM crop forecasts also contributed to a very successful season.

Harvesting mangoes before the rains came had two big advantages:

- there was very little rots in the fruit so the retailer and the consumer had confidence in buying the fruit and this moved the fruit quickly through the market chain, and
- the skins don't mark as easily when dry which gives a much better 1st to 2nd class quality ratio for the growers

Funding opportunities for on farm activities

Madonna Mackay DNRETA, Katherine Regional NRM facilitator ph 8973 8106.

Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA) Producer Demonstration Sites (PDS)

MLA is offering up to \$20 000 to northern beef producers and partner organisations over a two to three year period to undertake PDS projects. Projects should focus on the commercial implementation and adoption of MLA supported research and/or should address key research areas of the Northern Beef Program strategic plan. These include grazing land management, weed management, liveweight gain, reproductive performance, enterprise efficiency and animal health and welfare. PDS funds can be used for direct project operating costs, external project support and facilitation, communication and adoption costs, and some capital costs associated with project establishment.

To get a copy of the guidelines and for more information visit www.mla.com.au, or contact Rodd Dyer on (07) 3620 5234, rdyer@mla.com.au.

Australian Government Envirofund

The next round of Envirofund grants (Round 9) is expected to be open in early 2007. The Australian Government Envirofund is the local action component of the Natural Heritage Trust. It is for small projects aimed at conserving biodiversity and promoting sustainable resource use. This includes small on-ground projects tackling important local problems. The previous round provided up to \$50 000 per project.

Previous eligible activities have been

- native vegetation planting to stabilise soil or control active erosion
- fencing or management techniques to protect and preserve habitat, or manage access to coastal areas,
- controlling stock access to watercourses to protect streamside habitat and improve water quality,
- awareness raising activities that directly lead to significant local on-ground benefits for biodiversity conservation or sustainable resource use
- monitoring of water quality, species habitats or natural resources where this will have a clear benefit for biodiversity conservation or sustainable resource use.

For more information visit www.nht.gov.au/envirofund to get the Round 9 Guide and Application Form, contact your local Landcare facilitator or alternatively contact the Katherine Regional NRM facilitator Madonna Mackay on 8973 8106.

Positive opinions towards cattle producers

A national research survey has shown that urban Australians have a very positive view of Australian cattle graziers and pastoralists, with 85 per cent saying they do a good or very good job.

The most surprising discovery from the survey was that around 16 per cent of adults in Sydney and Melbourne -- the equivalent of 690,000 people -- would swap their city life for that of a cattle farmer if they had the chance.

Read more at: www.savanna.cdu.edu.au/internal/newsletters/ts1/ts103/urban_rural_divide.html

The National Heritage Trust funded enterprise planning project

Alister Trier, Director Pastoral Production, DPIFM

As part of the regional investment strategy, the National Resource Management Board of the Northern Territory has chosen to invest in an enterprise planning program for economic, environmental and social outcomes. Simone White and Trudi Oxley from DPIFM Pastoral Production in conjunction with Matt Bolam (ex National Landcare Program State Landcare Coordinator) will develop, promote and deliver a tailored enterprise planning program. The program will assist primary producers in the pastoral and agricultural sectors of the NT to critically analyse their enterprises to identify business, personal and NRM goals and directions, and take the actions needed to achieve these.

The program will initially work at a strategic level and then flow into the existing planning tools and training opportunities available, (i.e. finance, grazing land management, HR, natural resources).

Why?

We are all aware that sustainable business, human and natural resource management is essential in primary industries. A key challenge is to be able to plan, act and review to deliver the types of outcomes that the broader community is increasingly demanding as well as to stay profitable and sane.

More than 50% of the area of the NT is actively managed by individuals or companies for primary production purposes. We believe that working directly with these individuals and companies to assist in the implementation of a whole property planning cycle at the core of their business is a key part of achieving more sustainable primary production.

How?

Initially the project will undertake a review and update of the existing Property Management Planning type programs. The review will also include some case studies to identify what works and what doesn't in strategic planning, and once complete, a folder of resource materials to be used as the basis for delivery and a "How To" guide/toolkit to planning including current resources and support will be produced. This will then be delivered through workshops and one-on-one meetings with interested producers.

For more information contact: Simone White on 8973 9739

Crops, Forestry and Horticulture local best practice group activity

The next scheduled activity is a mango pruning and orchard rehabilitation workshop at Katherine Research Station on Wednesday 6 December 2006, 5.00pm. To register contact Deb Rock on 8973 9769 or email debbie.rock@nt.gov.au



Northern Territory Government

Department of Primary Industry, Fisheries and Mines

Pastoral Market Update

Live Cattle Exports via Darwin Port – **OCTOBER 2006**

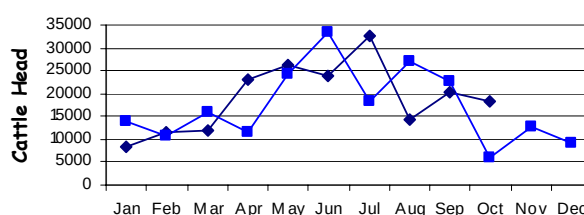
Please note that the "NT CATTLE" figures are NT cattle exported through the Port of Darwin only, some NT cattle are exported through interstate ports.

Destination	TOTAL CATTLE (including interstate)							# NT CATTLE						
	2004	2005	Last year 31/10/05	YTD 31/10/06	1-31 OCT	Previous Month	Difference	2004	2005	Last year 31/10/05	YTD 31/10/06	1-31 OCT	Previous Month	Difference
BRUNEI	14,101	6,642	4,767	5,581	706	0	0	10,492	6,462	4,767	5,581	706	0	0
INDONESIA	158,600	186,031	166,216	159,660	12,452	18,389	-5,937	150,048	184,767	164,952	157,782	12,452	18,389	-5,937
PHILIPPINES	31,623	13,052	13,052	10,071	0	0	0	29,393	12,438	12,438	10,071	0	0	0
SABAH	304	1,905	1,565	3,274	1,133	2,141	-1,008	304	1,905	1,565	2,460	1,133	2,141	-1,008
SARAWAK	320	04,893	4,893	1,883	0	0	0	0	4,893	4,893	1,883	0	0	0
W-MALAYSIA	6,379	93	93	10,299	4,095	0	+4,095	6,272	93	93	9,411	4,095	0	+4,095
EAST TIMOR	35	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	211,362	212,616	190,586	190,768	18,386	20,428	-2,042	196,509	210,558	188,708	187,188	18,386	20,428	-2,042
							+182							-1,520

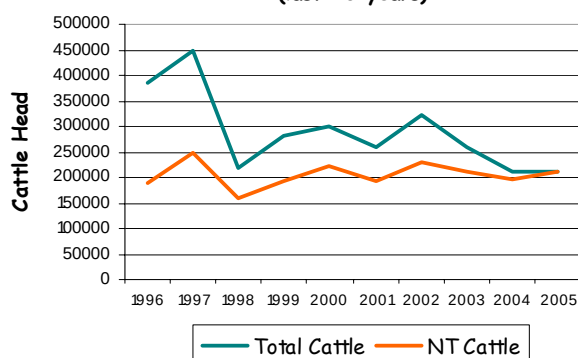
OCTOBER at a glance

- 18,386 head of cattle through the Port of Darwin during October, 2,042 head less than September, and 12,257 more than October last year.
- YTD figures indicate 182 head more than the same time last year.
- 1,611 buffalo, 869 goats and 208 camels were exported.
- 5,666 more buffalo have been exported than the same time last year.

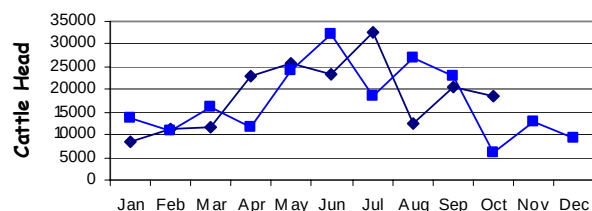
TOTAL Live Cattle Exports thru Port of Darwin 2005 v 2006



Live Cattle Exports thru the Port of Darwin (last 10 years)



NT Live Cattle Exports thru Port of Darwin 2005 v 2006



PREVIOUS 7 YEARS

Total Cattle, Port of Darwin							NT Cattle, Port of Darwin						
1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
219,439	280,011	299,179	258,127	322,602	260,618	211,042	160,412	192,441	222,669	193,172	229,796	212,520	205,204
						212,616							210,558

OTHER LIVESTOCK EXPORTS VIA DARWIN PORT (includes NT and Interstate Stock)

Destination	Buffalo			Camels			Goats			Deer			Horses			Sheep			Pigs		
	2005	2006	1-31 OCT	2005	2006	1-31 OCT	2005	2006	1-31 OCT	2005	2006	1-31 OCT	2005	2006	1-31 OCT	2005	2006	1-31 OCT	2005	2006	1-31 OCT
BRUNEI	816	230	60	34	0	0	1,097	741	275	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
INDONESIA	100	674	200	0	0	0	10	57	0	0	0	0	9	0	9	0	0	0	0	0	0
PHILIPPINES	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	450	0	0	0
W-MALAYSIA	672	5,430	730	0	343	208	0	3,702	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	781	0	0	0	0	0
SABAH	314	621	621	0	0	0	3,016	681	594	0	0	0	18	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	1,902	6,955	1,611	34	343	208	4,113	5,181	869	0	0	0	27	0	0	0	781	0	450	445	0

NATIONAL CATTLE PRICES - W/E 20/10/06

JAPAN OX									MEDIUM STEER								
This week Last week Year ago	Estimated dressed weight price (cents/kg)								This week Last week Year ago	Estimated dressed weight price (cents/kg)							
	SALEYARDS				O.T.HOOKS					SALEYARDS				O.T.HOOKS			
	NSW	QLD	SA	AV (Aust)	NSW	QLD	SA	AV (Aust)		NSW	QLD	SA	AV (Aust)	NSW	QLD	SA	AV (Aust)
	318	323	246	310	303	321	nq	303		282	307	317	256	302	308	Nq	303
	319	325	269	305	311	325	303	308		301	307	296	272	309	311	301	303
350	331	331	335	310	330	348	333	352	351	357	332	317	344	344	332		
US COW									TRADE STEER								
This week Last week Year ago	Estimated dressed weight price (cents/kg)								This week Last week Year ago	Estimated dressed weight price (cents/kg)							
	SALEYARDS				O.T.HOOKS					SALEYARDS				O.T.HOOKS			
	NSW	QLD	SA	AV (Aust)	NSW	QLD	SA	AV (Aust)		NSW	QLD	SA	AV (Aust)	NSW	QLD	SA	AV (Aust)
	214	233	156	205	240	228	nq	216		294	304	256	289	305	289	nq	315
	257	265	173	231	258	269	239	240		318	316	271	302	319	299	310	324
308	287	304	395	271	293	273	264	402	377	390	391	337	319	343	353		
LIVE EXPORT QUOTES									Prices courtesy of Meat & Livestock Australia  www.mla.com.au								
This week Last week Year ago	Estimated <u>live</u> weight price (cents/kg)																
	LIGHT STEERS (280-400 kg)				HEAVY STEERS (400+ kg)												
	Darwin		Fremantle		Darwin		Fremantle										
	nq		nq		nq		nq										
	190		nq		170		nq										
165		nq		155		nq											

CURRENCY EXCHANGE RATES

Key Currencies 1AUD =	Current 27.10.2006	Previous month 1.10.2006	3 months ago 1.8.2006	1 Year ago 1.11.2005	Pre-devaluation 01.07.1997
Brunei Dollar	1.21102	1.9841	1.19442	1.28924	1.076
Indonesian Rupiah	6,976.94	6,881.29	6,952.10	7,852.38	1830
Philippine Peso	38.13367	37.59232	39.31115	42.69084	19.84
Malaysian Ringgit	2.80995	2.75680	2.71388	2.87820	1.9
Euro	0.60305	0.58913	0.58154	0.63132	N/A
US Dollar	0.76258	0.74662	0.74457	0.76030	0.752

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Dates to put in your 2007 diary.....

The North Australian Beef Update Conference Townsville 20-22 March 2007

Katherine Research Station Farm & Garden Day 31 March 2007

NTCA AGM in Katherine 30 March 2007

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