

# Drought and climate adaptation program

## GrazingFutures Narrative

### Continuity yields results

#### A decade of relationship building sees landscape level change

Ten years of extension support with Eddie Maxwell, a beef producer on a family business in the McKinlay shire has seen reduction in stock numbers by approximately 1,000 AEs, cull cows turned off earlier and recognising the value of buying good quality hay for their weaning program.

Initial enquiries were around soil analysis for dryland cropping, quality testing of home harvested bush hay, property infrastructure mapping, and other general enquiries. These were answered in a timely manner and incorporated networks further afield as required

When the wet season failed in 2012/13, a land condition assessment of the entire property was done on a trip around the station in a ute with the property infrastructure map. It was identified that numbers needed to be drastically reduced to get through the ensuing dry years without further land degradation. Recording breeder numbers by age when drafting was also suggested and later adopted.

Approximately 1,000 AEs were sold over the ensuing 12 months – targeting the ageing and unproductive breeders. The majority of the breeder herd is now less than ten years old. Despite poor wet seasons for last 7 years, Eddie has seen an increase in the amount of residual cover at the break of season. More groundcover has put less stress on feeding stock. He continues to resist encouragement to increase numbers and has been working with the rest of his family on demonstrating economic value in turning off cows 10 years and older.

When extension work first began on this property, all weaners were fed locally cut bush hay. The majority of this hay was low quality – less than 50% digestibility. Over three or four years, hay quality testing was conducted by DAF extension staff, including follow up after each test result with accompanying nutrition calculations explaining why the hay would not meet maintenance demands.

Concurrently, forage quality testing of commercially grown hay crops in the area at the same time now means Eddie purchases all hay for the weaning process to ensure they are going on to quality feed.

The family have done economic analysis work with Bush Agribusiness through externally funded projects over the last decade which has helped cement the need for younger cull cow age, accurate herd records and attention to balancing stock numbers with pasture supply. Succession planning has also been identified as an issue that needs more attention moving forward.

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## **Summary**

Rapport building can be time consuming. Persistence, consistency and the basics of following up in a timely manner to a producer is rewarding in the short and long term for both the officer, producer and any associated organisations who can benefit from an established working relationship.

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