

Drought and climate adaptation program

GrazingFutures Narrative

Collaboration yields results

A Southern Gulf NRM's experience in GrazingFutures 2017 to 2019

When I started as a Rangelands Officer with Southern Gulf NRM in March 2017 there was very little collaboration between agencies in the region. I was keen to develop a network with the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) and other agencies to more effectively deliver projects through their working relationships with regional producers. My dream of operating within an established network was a far cry from reality in Southern Gulf in early 2017.

Early in 2017, DAF Richmond staff were on maternity leave and there were no DAF, AgForce, North Queensland Rural Financial Counselling Service (QRFCS), Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) or Department of Natural Resources and Mines (DNRM) staff working in the Southern Gulf region. A couple of months later Janessa Bidgood was appointed to the Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority (QRIDA) position. I approached DAF staff to present at workshops and field days however the travel distance was a difficult factor. DAF's Bob Shepherd did present at three field days that financial year.

In July 2017 GrazingFutures had the first team meeting in Longreach. I expected to meet and develop a working relationship with partners from the northern team however the only attendee was Alison Larard, then a consultant. At the end of the meeting when people were asked to comment on the value of the meeting, I said "Southern Gulf is in a drought of partners and agencies." I felt very flat after hearing about how the other regionally-based teams collaborated so well and achieved impressive outcomes.

As 2017 continued, things began to look up. Vol Norris from AgForce started and we collaborated on several multi-topic workshops in the region and have worked together since. DAF's Bec Gunther resumed part-time work in 2018 and DAF's David Phelps and Jenny Milson presented at Southern Gulf workshops and field days that year.

Two Grazing BMP workshops in 2018 were held with only Tim Emery, Tropical Beef Technology Service (TBTS) attending. Once DAF's Lindsey Perry was appointed to the Cloncurry office in late 2018, we began discussing how we could collaborate.

How things have changed in 2019!

The Southern Gulf region was in flood disaster mode just after Lindsey Perry started at DAF in early February. Lindsey, DAF's Shane Laffey and I had our first face-to-face flood meeting on Sunday 10 February. Lindsey and I also attended the Cloncurry Flood Recovery meeting the following day. Bec Gunther in Richmond was run off her feet assisting with the emergency response there with the road cut to Richmond.

DAF's David Phelps was in constant contact, via telephone, email and face-to-face during and following the floods trying to determine the types and extent of damage. Extra DAF beef extension staff were sent to Cloncurry and Richmond to assist with flood recovery.

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QRIDA's Janessa Bidgood was recalled, after her departure from the position, to assist in the immediate flood aftermath until Jessica Christeson took over. Tim Driscoll, RFDS, provided excellent support and collaboration in the critical phase during and after the flood. Sharyn Bunn is now based in the region. Glenn Budden, NQRFCs, set up an office in Richmond in late February to assist producers in the Richmond and Julia Creek districts.

More recently Industry Recovery Officers have been appointed, adding another layer of DAF staff to assist with flood recovery. Every effort has been made to involve this team with Southern Gulf NRM activities. Bob Shepherd has been outstanding with his commitment to assist producers after the floods with his pasture remediation and erosion control presentations at field days as well as spending weeks providing one-on-one on-property advice.

I am now also working with the Community Development Officers engaged by flood impacted councils. Southern Gulf NRM and McKinlay Shire Council are convening a collaborative workshop and fun activities event for producer families mid-November in Julia Creek. GrazingFutures partner agencies, the Primary Healthcare Network and the Sisters of the North charity are all participating in the event which takes a holistic approach to flood recovery.

Producers still have many hard yards to travel before they remediate their eroded and damaged pastures, rebuild their stock numbers and their infrastructure and recover mentally from such a tough year. The GrazingFutures team we have in place now will continue our collaboration to deliver targeted extension to fit the needs of regional landholders.

After Lindsey arrived, we met to discuss collaborative opportunities, including her involvement with Southern Gulf NRM federally-funded projects. The first neighbour day, hosted by Colin Burnett at Lara Downs, was planned for 5 February. The Lara neighbour day proceeded on 25 February and was the first of several in the region.

From the drought of regional partners when I first started with Southern Gulf NRM, I am now flooded by partners. We are constantly collaborating so that we can achieve better outcomes for the region's producers, particularly in their time of need following the floods.

The collaboration between GrazingFutures partners has also extended to training opportunities which strengthens our sense of teamwork. The Cloncurry DAF team participated in a Southern Gulf NRM LCAT training day with the Land Condition Assessment Tool. I appreciated the opportunity to attend RFDS mental health training conducted by Tim Driscoll for the Cloncurry/Gregory DAF and QRIDA team. The E-Beef project team have invited DAF staff and other NRM staff from the three regions to participate in ArcGIS training shortly.

New regional DAF positions have also been created at Cloncurry, Richmond and Gregory while Megan Munchenberg who knows the Gregory and Burketown districts well, is employed a few days a week. The level of collaboration among GrazingFutures in 2019 has been amazing. The Cloncurry DAF team and I regularly catch up or as our paths cross and we discuss opportunities as they arise.

I no longer feel envious of the other regions – we have an amazing GrazingFutures team here in Southern Gulf.

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