

# Drought and climate adaptation program

## GrazingFutures Narrative

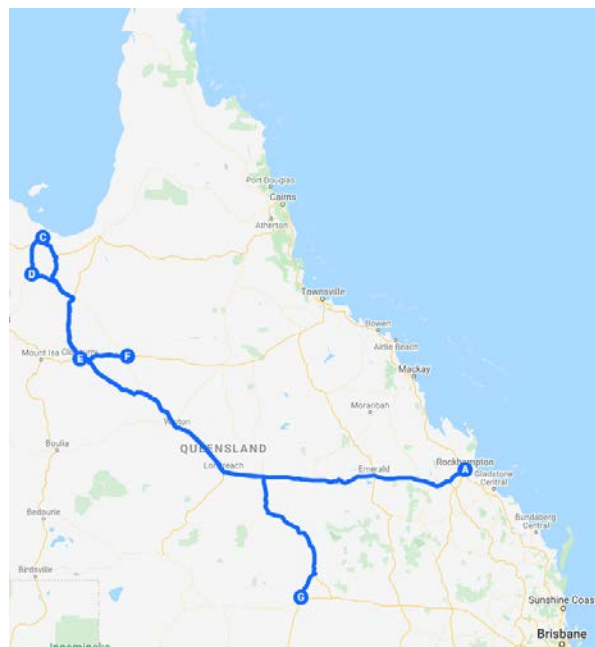
### North west Queensland educational road trip

The opportunity for young extension staff to work with Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) extension teams (based in other centres) to develop technical skills and a wider understanding of the northern grazing industry is incredibly valuable and an investment in their future. It also enhances learning and allows them to experience different land systems, operations, management practices, and regional challenges which contributes to a well-rounded extension officer.

In June 2021, I was privileged to be given the opportunity to spend two and a half weeks with the Rockhampton DAF and northern GrazingFutures (GF) teams. Whilst in Rockhampton I was able to complete follow-up from the south west \$ensible \$upplementation nutrition workshops conducted in April, as the workshop presenters and technical experts were based there. The workshops generated interest from producers to develop cost-effective lick rations with assistance from DAF after discovering their current licks were either 1) not meeting their animal's nutritional requirements or 2) expensive, in comparison to other suitable options.

Working directly with Mick Sullivan and Kylie Hopkins I was able to use the FeedCalc spreadsheet tool, formulate suitable licks and respond to graziers with some cost effective supplementation options. Although online meeting platforms would have allowed for this interaction to occur remotely, it was far more impactful to work one-on-one within the team to deliver this follow-up to producers.

Travelling from Rockhampton to 'Armrainald', Burketown (with Rockhampton staff) for breeder management workshops allowed me to experience significant changes in land types, which I was unfamiliar with, coupled with changing production systems including different grazing land management strategies, pasture species, and regional challenges. The breeder management workshops organised by the northern GF team with Mick Sullivan provided a perfect example of succession planning. The opportunity for younger staff to present technical content with an experienced extension officer observing allowed for confidence building and facilitation skill development. Having Mick prompting where necessary and offering assistance and experience when answering producer questions was reassuring and ensured attendees and extension staff walked away with a positive experience.



# Drought and climate adaptation program

During the two breeder management workshops, I presented the complete 'pile of grass activity' which visually shows how much grass a 450kg cow is required to eat during differing stages of production. As I have not presented technical content before on this topic, the experience was made significantly easier knowing other staff were able to step in and assist if key messages were accidentally missed. Having the 'safety net' of experienced staff observing provides reassurance and allows for the opportunity to debrief after the activity, ensuring a more comprehensive delivery in the future.



The workshops were also complemented by paddock walks delivered by Megan Munchenberg, Lindsey Perry, and Kieran Smith from the northern GF team. The 'Armraynald' workshop focused on completing pasture budgets and the importance of revisiting estimates throughout the season. Desmanthus Progarides establishment was discussed with examples of how the species can be used to complement existing pastures. As legume establishment isn't suitable for large parts of SWQ my knowledge and experience surrounding the science was limited. The ability to hear discussions and producer perspectives on the topic was insightful and may prove useful when working with producers in the eastern parts of the SW region. The 'Gleeson' workshop focused on Mitchell grass establishment and why it's essential to manage land condition and wet season spell. As Mitchell grass is present in parts of the south west this session improved my understanding of the species and how to correctly manage stocking rates to ensure the health of the pasture.

Most value from the trip came from discussions with staff whilst travelling. The opportunity to learn and ask questions during general conversation when travelling shouldn't be underestimated. After spoiling winter rainfall Lindsey Perry and I travelled throughout Cloncurry, Julia Creek, and McKinlay districts to take a number of soil moisture depth readings and conduct land condition scoring. The trip allowed me to gain a regional perspective on the topic after talking to locals about their experiences on what damage the out of season rain may cause to pastures. The concept of spoiling



# Drought and climate adaptation program

rain was something I had never experienced as winter rain is generally welcomed in the south west of the state due to its ability to grow large volumes of beneficial herbage, which can obscure declines in quality of the grass component of a pasture. A key experience was also seeing the lasting impact that the 2019 flood event is still having on some Mitchell grass and Flinders pastures around the region.



During the trip, I also visited two properties in the region. The first was with Mick to chat about suitable supplement options and the second, with Kieran, who walked the producer through an agistment calculator. The exercise with Kieran was useful and demonstrated to the producer, who was considering sending weaners to New South Wales on agistment, how sensitive his gross margin was to changes in cattle prices and live weight gain. My experience from this exercise was although the producer was still considering the option of agistment, he appreciated the opportunity to discuss options with a non-biased source who was able to work through problems with him.



# Drought and climate adaptation program

Visiting the Rockhampton DAF and northern GrazingFutures teams has given me a taste of how other extension teams operate and provided a new-found level of enthusiasm, encouragement and confidence to return to my region and engage producers in property visits. Property visits are addictive and is often where the real learning for both the extension officer and producer takes place. Since returning to the south west region I have strived to step out of my comfort zone, ask more questions and take any opportunity to get out on property.

Allowing extension staff to travel and spend time within other teams is invaluable to the development of younger staff and ensures the legacy and information of experienced colleagues is retained. The support from GrazingFutures to do this is contributing to the development of well-rounded extension staff, which is critical in building drought-ready livestock operations in western Queensland.

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**Permissions:** External

## SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES

